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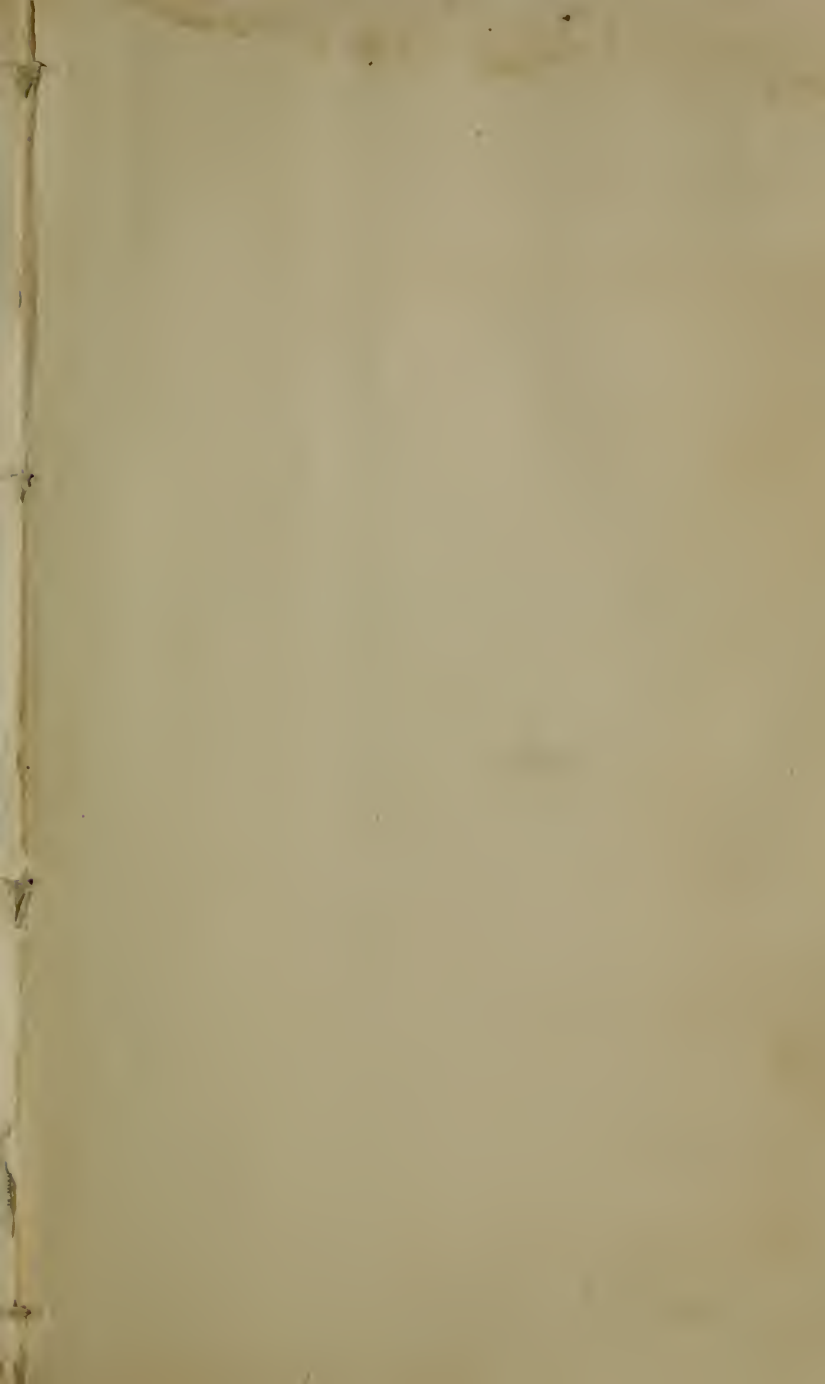
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THE MOCCASIN TELEGRAPH

By Hal G. Evarts

THE CROSS PULL

THE PASSING OF THE OLD WEST

THE BALD FACE: AND OTHER
ANIMAL STORIES

THE SETTLING OF THE SAGE

FUR SIGN

TUMBLEWEEDS

SPANISH ACRES

THE PAINTED STALLION

THE MOCCASIN TELEGRAPH

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By
HAL G. EVARTS



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THE MOCCASIN TELEGRAPH

CHAPTER I

LAVERNE, following down behind the break-up of the ice, had covered the first half of his journey. The nearest railroad point lay a thousand miles behind but there was yet a like distance to be traversed before he should attain his destination on the Arctic coast.

The route that he followed was the one main artery of fur-trade travel into the North. The travel consisted of but one trip annually, when the traders brought in a year's supplies to the scant dozen trading posts that were strung out at wide intervals between Track's End and the Arctic coast. Nevertheless, even with two-hundred-mile gaps between posts, this route constituted the one tentacle of civilization stretching forth into a half million square miles of trackless wilderness.

Laverne's canoe was now a tiny speck in the broad sweep of the Mackenzie. He angled inshore and beached his craft on the point of a bar from which there presently rose the smoke of his camp fire.

A native canoe glided downstream and its occupant, an aged Indian, joined Laverne.

"Me Anatak," he said by way of introduction. "Plenty hungry, me."

"I've never yet laid eyes on a native that wasn't hungry," Laverne replied. "All right, Anatak; fall to."

The Indian produced a bottle and tendered it to Laverne. It was a wide-mouthed affair plugged with a moldy cork. Within it reposed five tablets of birch bark upon which writing of some sort was discernible.

"What tell?" Anatak inquired.

Laverne applied the point of his knife to the cork, meanwhile inquiring of Anatak:

"Where you find him?"

"Lee-ard," said Anatak, pointing to the westward. "Lee-ard."

Laverne knew that he had found it somewhere on the Liard River, a stream of generous proportions that flowed into the Mackenzie from the westward, emptying into it a hundred miles or more north of the Great Slave Lake. The Liard, and the scores of tributary streams that flowed into it from the north and south, drained a tremendous area of unknown country that stretched westward to the divide separating the watersheds of the Yukon and Mackenzie, on the far slope of which reposed the few settlements of Alaska and the Yukon. It was from off in there somewhere that the bottle came. A man might take his pick of any one of perhaps a score of creeks that flowed into each of the many rivers tribu-

tary to the Liard, a choice of probably four hundred different localities, in the hazarding a guess as to the particular one in which the bottle had been launched.

The cork yielded to his knife and he extracted the slender tablets of birch bark. He expelled a soft whistling breath of surprise as he noted that the first tablet bore a date of a dozen years before. He perused the message twice. Then the native, observing him, knew that the white man's thoughts had strayed far afield.

Now the North is a land of queer rumors, any of which may prove to be true, for there are vast areas that have never known the tread of a white man and it is from these unknown regions that most of the strange tales emanate. Perhaps, in lieu of a better definition, one might term it a manifestation, that agency known to the white man as the Moccasin Telegraph, by which odd bits of news are flashed from one isolated native camp to another. It has defied both scientific analysis and the metaphysical gropings of the whites, yet the fact remains that weird rumors, later proven to be founded upon at least a grain of truth, are circulated by some mysterious agency, springing up simultaneously in a dozen isolated native camps that are separated by vast distances. And those who have lived long in the North do not disregard the mutterings of the Moccasin Telegraph.

When natives in camps a thousand miles apart began whispering of a secret white colony on the

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Yellowknife, Newlen went in, returning a year later to report having found an old cabin and the fresh bones of several men. Similar reports had once been circulated to the effect that an evil spirit prowled the head reaches of the Carcajou, a region unknown to either whites or natives save for the country immediately adjacent to the mouth of that stream, where it emptied into the Mackenzie in the shade of the Arctic Circle. McBain, pushing up the Carcajou in search of virgin trapping territory, found Eric Thorne, given up as dead for five years past, still alive but demented and shy as a northern loon, and with a laugh as weird and vacant as the cry of that elusive bird. Years ago there had been persistent whispers to the effect that the ghost of a white woman shrieked of nights on the Kotcho. Only the past season the first party of whites had penetrated that region and had found a miserable hut of poles and mud, in which were moldy remnants of a woman's apparel. Laverne's thoughts flitted from one to another of a score of similar rumors that had been set in motion by the Moccasin Telegraph within the scope of his recollection; but his thoughts were recalled to the present by the native.

"What tell?" Anatak inquired again, indicating the message with a forefinger.

Laverne now committed an error that has been all too common in the history of the white man's relations with primitive peoples. He lied clumsily. Anatak was a simple soul and he would have believed

any impossible yarn of the wonders of miles beyond his ken. But concerning matters that were within the realm of his own observation and experience, he was not gullible.

"Two men," said Laverne, holding up a pair of fingers. "They trap. No find um plenty fur. Beaver, mink, marten, fox—she all gone. They go outside," and he pointed to the south to indicate the direction of their departure.

Anatak nodded without change of expression. Why, he wondered, would two men who were about to leave a region take the pains to launch a message to that effect when they could report it in person long before there was any likelihood that the message would be found. White men did not do foolish things like that. So he put a catch question.

"How long tam ago?" he asked.

"Last year," said Laverne. "Before the snows came last."

Again Anatak nodded. He knew perfectly well that the drift pile in which he had found the bottle had been deposited there by the high water of eight years before. That had been a winter of heavy snows followed by an early spring with torrential rains that had swelled the streams to overflowing. No spring flood since had reached within several feet of the drifts that had been left stranded by the receding waters of that year. Since the white man lied so enormously, it seemed that the message might prove valuable. Besides, Anatak rather fancied the

Yellowknife handy container, so he held out his hand to receive it. Laverne, however, declined to receive it, retaining it himself instead.

ci Anatak dropped off downstream. From the corner of his eye he saw the white man reach for his rifle and half lift it to his shoulder, then lower it again. The message, thought Anatak, must have contained information of great value thus to have tempted this man to take his life. No doubt the white man was aware that Anatak had no knowledge as to the contents of the message, else he would not have held his hand.

The incident so impressed Anatak that some weeks later, chancing to meet Villiers, a mysterious character known throughout the north as the Psychic Prospector, he related to him the details of the matter.

After the departure of the native, Laverne sat for long and stared into the dying embers of his camp fire. The most feasible way to explore the courses of the streams that flowed into the headwaters of the Liard from the south, he reflected, would be to work in from the coast of British Columbia and travel east across the divide by dog team in the winter, instead of working westward up the Liard from the Mackenzie. His plans, apparently so definite but a few hours before, were now suddenly altered. When he broke camp in the morning, instead of heading north into the Arctic, he turned back upon his course and traveled south.

Six months thereafter, and a thousand miles removed from the spot where his trail and Anatak's had crossed, Laverne was landed from a coastwise steamer upon the shores of northern British Columbia. He traveled east by dog team, and far up the course of a creek that headed against the divide he built a cabin. For some years thereafter he headquartered first in one isolated spot and then another, in the shadow of the divide. Occasionally some group of wandering prospectors discovered one or another of his cabins. It was said that he was gone for a year or more at a time, and that he crossed eastward over the divide to the unknown regions between the crest of it and the great Mackenzie. He was a taciturn chap and volunteered small information to those who questioned him upon a few occasions when he came outside to some trading post for supplies. Big gold strikes were made in Alaska and the Yukon. Swarms of prospectors stampeded from one spot to another when new strikes were rumored or reported. But Laverne continued along his customary lines. Already there was talk of the possibility of a big strike being made in those unknown regions to the eastward. Rumors travel with amazing rapidity in the gold camps, and anything that smacks of mystery ever excites the suspicions of the prospecting fraternity. From the camps of the Cassiar in British Columbia to those of the upper Yukon it was whispered that Laverne had no need of rushing off with other stampeders to every new

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strike that was reported. It was said that he alone knew the secrets of the interior on the east slope of the divide in the Liard country and that he was on the trail of the biggest gold strike of all history.

CHAPTER II

CLAY HARRINGTON, traveling on the ice of the Yukon, listened but inattentively to Van Dorn's rambling gossip of the mining camps.

Harrington had come with the first wave of adventurers who had been drawn to the North when Nome, Fairbanks, Forty-mile, the Klondike, Dawson—all those magic names—had been heralded to the world and linked with visions of fabulous wealth reaped overnight. And his coming had seemed natural enough. A blond giant with the strength and endurance of two men, he had simultaneously attained to his early thirties and the front rank of his profession, having earned a reputation which might well be envied by any mining engineer. But now men wondered somewhat. During his two years in the North he had not practiced his profession, except perhaps to give the benefit of his advice to those who sought it. He remained unexcited at whispers of new strikes that sent others of the gold-seeking fraternity on wild stampedes. He had become known the length of the Yukon as a confirmed drifter, a restless soul who could not be content to remain in any one spot for long. His name was linked with

the few others that identified a small group of men who made lone trips to that mysterious region to the east of the divide.

The twinkling lights of a trading post gleamed frostily and the two travelers cared for their dogs and entered the big log room in which a dozen men were gathered. Harrington drank moodily as he watched a poker game. One of the three girls in the place leaned against his big frame, her hands creeping to his shoulders as she gazed up at him.

"You like me?" she wheedled.

He nodded and smiled down at her. There was kindness and understanding in the smile—and abstraction. The kindness drew her to him, appealing to her, but it was the abstraction that presently disengaged her and she drifted away, strangely disconcerted, to break into shrill laughter with a group of miners at the bar. The laughter was to cover confusion, for she, who received many a direct affront and was capable of answering with withering invective, was vaguely baffled and half hurt. Perhaps the man caught that note in her shrill peals of false merriment, for he roused suddenly from his preoccupation.

"Come here, my dear."

She moved back to him and he patted her shoulder, slipping a heavy gold coin into her palm. For a space she lingered uncertainly, half believing that he had meant it by way of retaining her attractions, then knew for a certainty that he had not.

"Thanks," she said, a trace both of wistfulness and of sullenness in her tones. He acknowledged that with a barely perceptible nod, his brief engaging smile, and was not even conscious of her going as she drifted away.

He left that impression with men as well as with the dance-hall girls of the camps, as if he was conscious of what went on about him but that some vital part of him was detached and viewing other scenes; that only the surface of his consciousness was engaged with present pursuits and immediate surroundings. Also he had a reputation for personal recklessness in the face of any emergency, an almost fatalistic disregard of danger. Round every camp were some turbulent souls whose chief delight was in seeking strife and trouble. On one or two occasions Harrington had been prodded into action. Thereafter he was carefully passed up when those who posed as bad actors went on the warpath. He did not indulge in spending sprees to advertise affluence, which was of common occurrence among the miners, but he was known as a loose but quiet spender.

He sat in the poker game and played with that same air of detachment. The game was not large, and after an hour or more of indifferent success, Harrington won a series of stiff pots and broke the game, winning perhaps a thousand dollars. He sat there with his winnings piled carelessly before him, not troubling to count them.

One player, Al Reese, sat there after the others

had left the table. He passed his tongue across dry lips to moisten them preparatory to addressing Harrington.

"Listen, Clay, I don't like to ask you," he began, "but I'm flat—cleaned out. I was a fool to sit in." He explained that just before freeze-up he had struck likely color on a virgin creek but the snow had shut off operations. He had come out with funds barely sufficient to purchase supplies with which to go back to his claim and winter through. "She's good, Clay, I do believe. Would you lend me a hundred? Maybe I can worry through on that, by feeding mostly on meat."

Harrington shoved his entire winnings toward Reese.

"Grubstake—if you want it," he offered. "Or I'll lend you two or three hundred if you'd rather."

Reese's face lighted up and he pocketed the entire sum.

"We'll make it a grubstake," he said. "Cause that dirt's rich, Clay. She's good. Half interest in all I strike is yours."

Harrington nodded.

"Want a paper to that effect?" Reese asked, and Harrington replied with a negative gesture of the head. He had grubstaked many a down-and-out prospector with equal informality. After all the others had retired, he still stood at the bar, taking an occasional drink.

"Where you an' old Van Dorn headed now, Clay?"

the proprietor inquired. "You're both lone-handers, or have that name. Decided to partner it for a spell, you two?"

"Yes. Partners for a trip outside," Harrington said.

"Outside! But you're headed down-river," the man objected.

"We had a notion to leave the river at Circle and head for the diggings at Fairbanks, then mush out through Alaska and sail from Valdez," Harrington explained.

The urge to revisit the outside world and the life from which he had fled two years before was on him again, a compelling urge. The liquor served to augment rather than to dispel memories which he had sworn to forget. He took occasional short turns about the room, oblivious to the curious regard of the trader. When that worthy at last retired, he placed a bottle and glass on the bar and Harrington was not even aware of his departure. He was still standing there when old Van Dorn, after some eight hours of refreshing slumber, rose and prepared to hit the trail.

The penetrating cold braced Harrington and swept the fog from his brain without, however, dispelling the memories that occasioned his restlessness. Again he listened inattentively to Van Dorn's predictions that the biggest strike in all history would be made some day to the east of the watershed. While tens of thousands rushed to the new gold

fields of Alaska and the Yukon, scouring every creek and penetrating every mountain fastness, the activity had been confined to the westward of the Yukon-Mackenzie divide. On the eastern side of the watershed from which the water drained to the Arctic lay the vast mysterious interior, still guarding its secrets, still uninvaded even by this hardy swarm of adventurers; thousands of square miles that had never been scarred by a prospector's pick, thousands of miles of streams on whose courses never a pint of gravel had been sampled in a gold-pan. Van Dorn too, was one of the hardy few who had braved those regions. But Harrington had heard all that before.

There was the case of Culver. He had disappeared from the haunts of man for three long years, then had staggered into Rampart House on the Porcupine, determined of mind, frozen of body, and raving of a strike that was rich beyond the dreams of avarice. And Culver had gold on him when he died.

Then there was that tale, known the length of the Yukon, of the bearded stranger—presumably the same in each instance—who on each of three successive years had turned up at different small trading posts on the Yukon slope, driving a team of splendid Mackenzie huskies. In each instance he had purchased a sled-load of supplies, paid for them from a sack of coarse gold, and left the latter in care of the trader. A new strike! In each instance stam-

peders made ready to follow when the stranger should return for his gold—and as invariably he had departed without it, leaving it behind as so much worthless sand. Those adventurous souls who had taken his trail reported that it had headed straight out over the divide and on into the heart of the unknown interior where, on each occasion, it had been blotted out by a heavy fall of new snow.

And there was Villiers, the Psychic Prospector, whom Harrington knew and admired, but whose name was almost a myth on the Yukon slope. There was Laverne, whose operations were farther to the south, and who crossed over to the headwaters of the Liard. And there were other tales. Harrington had heard them all. On a vast front, from the scene of Culver's operations beyond the Arctic Circle down to the southern edge of the territories, gold had been brought out by various intrepid souls who had penetrated the unexplored regions to the east of the Yukon-Mackenzie divide.

Goldseekers in the mass are a temperamental lot, prone to stampede at the merest whisper of a strike. With years of prophecy of the big stake to come, rumors supplemented by more than one instance of tangible proof, it would seem odd that not a single stampede to the east of the divide had occurred in all these years. Inaccessibility was the answer—the difficulty of transportation of supplies. One who would brave that country must start with two years' supplies, travel eastward from the Yukon one winter,

prospect during the brief summer months and return another year.

"Oh, yes, it's likely over there all right—barrels of it," Harrington assented indifferently, in answer to Van Dorn. "But it's a tough proposition to get at it."

Presently Clay's thoughts returned to center upon the old prospector's discourse.

"Then I began to hear it," Van Dorn was saying. "Faint like, it was at first, but I knowed it for the sound of falling water. I headed toward it and it didn't grow much louder that day or the next, increasing a mite in volume but still seeming a long ways ahead. Another two days, and it was a steady vibration pounding on my ears, a low roar, sort of. It pervaded the whole landscape but still I hadn't caught up with it. I started to grow downright spooky and to speculate aplenty. Maybe my mind was slipping and starting me off chasing some phantom waterfalls that was only a roaring in my ears. Recollect, now, that I hadn't seen a human face or heard the sound of a human voice, hadn't even laid eyes on a moccasin track for close onto two years' time. Men do go queer, living too much alone. 'Van Dorn,' says I, 'your turn has come. You're imagining things. You've missed one too many boats. You'd better mush outside where folks is plentiful or you'll be baying at the moon.' Then I run on to something that convinced me I was crazier than a cricket. A stark raving panic clutched me and I

turned and ran. I tried to outdistance the sound of that phantom falls but it was always with me. Then there come a time when I couldn't hear it any longer, but for two weeks I kept straining my ears, expecting it to come back on me. But it never did. Of course I know now that it was a whale of a waterfall back in there somewheres, not just the sound of my mind crumbling into bits, like I suspected at the time. Some day, Son, I'm going back and locate it."

Harrington had planned to leave the Yukon at Circle with Van Dorn, mush out to the coast, and sail for the outside, but he suddenly altered his plans. By traveling up the Porcupine, crossing the divide and descending the far slope, he would strike McPherson, located some five hundred miles east of Point Barrow. McPherson was the most northerly of the dozen interior posts that were stretched out at wide intervals over the two-thousand-mile course from Track's End to the Arctic coast. Then, by traveling throughout the rest of the winter, he would reach the northern fringe of settlements in the provinces before the break-up of the ice.

Bidding Van Dorn farewell, he held on down the Yukon to its confluence with the Porcupine, exactly on the Arctic Circle, and turned his dogs up that stream. For weeks he forged ahead through the gloom of the Arctic night. All sense of time, at least in relation to calendar days or months, was left behind, his only reckoning consisting of so many days on the trail. The way seemed as endless as the

perpetual twilight and the shifting snow. Such phenomena as running water, green growing things and the light of the summer sun seemed vague mental images of some previous state of existence that would never come again. There was silence, supreme and unbroken save for the grating hiss of powdered snow; darkness save for the ghostly pallor of the snow fields and an occasional flare-up of the Northern Lights.

Yet still there traveled with him, out in the obsecurity ahead, as if to torment his soul, the vision of a face, in every gust of wind the cadence of a beloved voice, all combining to produce a devastating sense of loss that seemed irreparable.

After some seven weeks on the trail he was roused one day from his abstractions by a low rumble that emanated from the throat of Chief, the leader of his team, the rumble ending in a whine.

"What's the matter, Chief?" Harrington asked. "What is it, boy?"

He observed the big leader closely. Every dog was eager and alert. There was no suggestion of danger in their manner, no tense excitement such as might prevail in the immediate vicinity of game. Rather they seemed eager to increase the pace after a long hard day on the trail, and Harrington knew that there was a camp somewhere off ahead.

He speculated afresh upon this strange faculty possessed by animals but denied to man. How could Chief have divined the presence of men or human

habitation? The wind was at his back, so the dog could not possibly have caught the faintest ribbon of scent from the country ahead. The hiss and grate of powdered snow precluded all thought that vibration of sound had reached his ears against the wind. And his knowledge could not have been derived from the sight of a familiar landmark, for he had never been in these parts before. Yet he knew—and knowing, had conveyed the information to his master.

Harrington traveled on for five hours before verifying Chief's prophecy. Then the dogs broke through into a beaten trail on which loomed the figure of a native.

"McPherson?" Harrington asked, pointing down the trail, and the native assented, falling in with him.

Presently, from just ahead of them, a dog lifted its voice in the mournful wolfhowl that is the tribal call of the huskies, and every dog in the post joined in, a hundred voices swelling the chorus that was freighted with all the aching misery of the ages. As the concert died away, it seemed to remind the native of something and he pointed to the south.

"Off there, t'ousant mile mebbe, wild dogs she howl," he said. "You know that place?"

"No, I've never heard of it," said Harrington. That would place it, he reflected, somewhere in the region described to him by Van Dorn.

For another month he traveled southeast in leisurely fashion on the ice of the Mackenzie, stopping for several days at Good Hope and Norman, posts

spaced some two hundred miles apart. It was outside this last-named post that a native pointed off to the southwest.

"Ghost, she lead wolf pack on the hunt that place," he volunteered.

Again the region designated was somewhere near the country of Van Dorn's wanderings.

"Over by the big falls that no man has seen?" Harrington inquired.

The native assented eagerly.

"Hear plenty big water; no see um," he said. "Ground, she burn that place. No good go there."

"Ol' Man de Nort' she live there," another native told him later, pointing.

"Ole Mandenort?" Harrington queried. "Oh! I see. The Old Man of the North lives there," he interpreted, chuckling. "Is that it?"

"Um," the Indian grunted, nodding.

Bit by bit he pieced out the fable that the Old Man of the North lived in the phantom falls that no man had seen. That the ground burned round about and that ghosts led the wolves on the hunt in that vicinity. Versions varied greatly but there was a basic germ of the same idea in each of them.

As Harrington traveled farther to the south and the winter became further advanced, there were a few hours of light daily—no sun, but merely a lifting of the pall, a brief period of pallor spreading across the snow fields. It was strange, he thought, that between this one string of interior posts and the new

gold camps of the Yukon and the British Columbia regions there was no known route of crossing for two thousand miles save that one, at the extreme northern end of the continent, by which he had come from the Yukon to the McPherson post.

"I'd like to have a look-see at that country Van Dorn was telling us about, Chief," he said. "The Moccasin Telegraph is clicking all over the North and spreading strange yarns about that region. Maybe we'll take a jaunt in there another season."

But he had no intention of visiting that country at the present time. The desire to get back to the outside world had become a compelling urge and he could not crush it back after three months on the trail alone. He reached Fort Simpson, a trading post and a mission situated at the confluence of the Liard and the Mackenzie. He slept for a few hours at the post and took the trail again.

After some five hours of travel a point of light showed ahead. As he approached, it resolved itself into a fire of generous proportions, blazing merrily before a ten-foot bank that served to reflect the heat. A man sat with his back to the bank. The sound of sleigh runners on the ice reached his ears and he lifted his voice.

"Ho! Harrington! Welcome to my fireside!"

This hail drifting out into the night, amazed and startled Harrington. He veered in toward the fire and recognized the swarthy features of Villiers, the Psychic Prospector. The whole north country

credited this man with possessing peculiar powers of divination. Harrington knew him, not as a mystic but as a man of exceptional intelligence, one in whom the natives freely confided, and with an uncanny knack for piecing together odd scraps of information. This greeting was characteristic of the man.

"I believe you are a mystic, after all," Harrington declared as he shook Villiers' hand. "How did you know I was anywhere in this country and how could you recognize the sound of my sled runners in the night?"

Villiers' black eyes glowed with a peculiar light. He assumed a dreamy, far-away expression and when he spoke his voice came in a flat weird monotone.

"I project myself. My astral senses hover over the Arctic wastes. Step by step I see you coming down out of the North. You are not alone, for always I am close to you in spirit. I see you pass a big bald hill on the last edge of trees." Step by step he followed Harrington's route, describing unmistakable landmarks, his voice flowing on in a resonant monotone that was almost a chant. "At last our trails converge and my second self guides you to the spot where our fleshly shells now meet."

As if with an effort, Villiers drew himself back to the present, the vacant expression faded from his eyes and his voice assumed its natural tones.

"How's that?" he inquired.

"Wonderful!" Harrington commented. "Your second self traveled over the Arctic Trail in the first

person years ago, so naturally you know the landmarks. You know that I came down out of the North step by step. And it was a stiff wind out of the west that guided my footsteps under the shelter of the west bank of the river, for the same reason that you camped under it, and thus led to a meeting of our mortal hulks. Still, I don't know how you guessed it."

"Quite simple," said Villiers. "I met Van Dorn in Seattle when he landed from Alaska, and he said you had headed for the interior over the Arctic Trail. This is the one route to the outside. I went inland to Edmonton and headed north. Reckoning our probable rates of travel, it seemed that our trails must cross on the ice of the Mackenzie somewhere within a reasonable distance north of Great Slave Lake. A native left the Simpson post while you slept, and when we met on the ice he informed me that you would soon be starting on. And here you are."

"And here I am," Harrington agreed. "Are you going back outside with me?"

"I'd planned somewhat to reverse that schedule," Villiers said. "Last year, in anticipation of a trip into new country, possibly with a companion, I arranged with the Nahanni to make two canoes and cache them at a designated spot on the Liard. We could reach them before the ice goes out, each take a canoe and go our separate ways into that unknown country west of the Mackenzie and north of the

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Liard, then meet again on the Mackenzie in the fall and mush outside after the freeze-up."

But Harrington declined. Three months on the trail alone, except for thoughts that were not good company, was too long, he said. No more of that for him.

"Love!" Villiers presently observed. "Love is one of the greatest natural forces. A very great accumulation of wealth is one of the most powerful artificial forces behind civilization. Frequently these two forces conflict. It is unfortunate that in your case they should have clashed."

"This time I concede your powers of divination," Harrington said.

"But it required only the most casual observation," Villiers protested. "You had wealth and position, the entrée to the best circles, a personality that cemented the friendship of men and women, children and dogs. More than all that, you had achieved honor and recognition in your profession. When a man of that caliber suddenly tosses it all over-board and takes to wandering, moody and alone in the wilderness, without interest in work or play, and rumors of recklessness begin to link themselves with his name, there's only one answer on this little green earth of ours to account for it—a woman."

Harrington, without comment, made a gesture of assent.

"Love is not logical," Villiers said. "That is, it

does not originate in logic, so cannot be dispelled by it. Therefore the application of logic will avail one little as a cure, as no doubt you have learned long since. Time! Time is Nature's anesthetic. Even if it does not bring complete forgetfulness, it induces a growing indifference. And as to time," Villiers shrugged negligently. "What do a few months more or less matter in the end?"

Harrington envied this man his eternal placidity. The product of the union of a white father and a mother who was half white and half Cree, Villiers was a quarter-blood. Had the white blood in him been of Scotch extraction he would, in all probability, have been ruddy-cheeked, fair-skinned, light-eyed—the usual results of the Scotch-native cross. The other common cross of the North, the French-native mixture, tends to the opposite extreme, the resulting offspring frequently being even more swarthy than the native strain in their ancestry might seem to justify. And of this mixture was Villiers. Extremely dark, with black eyes and straight black hair, his was the broad face adorned with the prominent cheek bones of the native. Extremely intelligent, widely read and extensively traveled, he had succeeded in eradicating the last trace of his youthful dialect and accent. Nevertheless, except for the friendship of a few men such as Harrington, who recognized the man's unusual qualities, Villiers had found himself largely cut off from intimate association with his intellectual peers. Yet he had risen

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above the mental travail occasioned by this burden and now seemed the symbol of absolute serenity.

"What's there of interest in that country?" Harrington asked. After all, he reflected, Villiers was right. What could time matter to him in the end? In his present frame of mind he could as well put in his time at one place as another. "Have you heard of a big falls back in there?"

Villiers smiled.

"And all the other things that the Moccasin Telegraph is ticking about," he said. "It is on the headwaters of a river that flows into the Liard from the north. Even the Nahanni folk have been up its course only a few miles above the mouth. Your northern aborigine is no traveler, and if meat and fish are plentiful he may reside for generations in a relatively small area. The early tribal feuds fixed that habit. I'd suggest that you post off up that stream while I go farther up the main Liard on some investigations of my own. Then we can meet back here on the Mackenzie in the fall." He smiled suddenly upon Harrington. "I send you to the country of the big falls in search of that peace of mind that you covet—and to-morrow we start."

CHAPTER III

THE distant roar of the falls had throbbed in Harrington's ears for many days. It had come to be a very part of things, pervading all Nature. His entire being had become so attuned to it that there were times when he was not conscious of hearing it. All minor sounds—the startled cries of wild fowl, golden babble of songbirds back in the forest, the weird laughter of the loons at night—seemed even louder by contrast, as if the vibrations of this never-ending chant served to intensify all alien notes that clashed with its cadences.

On the day that the ice had gone out he had left Villiers at the point where this unnamed stream flowed into the Liard. Already he had attained to a point some two hundred miles beyond where even the Nahanni had penetrated and the whole summer lay before him.

The banks of the stream were low, rolling hills alternating with quivering muskeg flats that were apparently bottomless yet heavily forested with spruce, aspen, birch and balm-of-Gilead. Harrington turned aside to explore the courses of inflowing creeks, halting occasionally to wash in his gold pan a

few samples of dirt from some promising bar. He had left all his dogs save Chief to be cared for in a Nahanni camp on the Liard and the big leader cruised along the shores abreast of the canoe. The trees met above the waters of incoming creeks, fashioning their courses into water-floored and leaf-roofed tunnels. Waterfowl took wing with raucous clamor as the canoe slipped silently round the bends. Unseen songsters gushed liquid strains of melody from back in the somber depths of the moss-hung forest. The noiseless gliding of the canoe afforded opportunities to make close approach to moose that stood in the water—big bulls with their antlers in the velvet, cows with ungainly calves. Never a day passed without encountering bears. Whole colonies of beavers that had not yet been terrorized by the trap line regarded this queer, moving object curiously; and on one occasion a family of otters swam round the canoe. This was the wilderness primeval, unscarred by the works of man.

When one is thrown into intimate contact with virgin wilderness, be it in a trackless swamp, the snow-capped heights of mountain ranges or in the burning trackless desert, it engenders an odd mixture of self-reliance and humility; the former for the reason that the only equation to be considered is that of one's own ability to cope with the forces of Nature; humility for the reason that no man may abide alone in the wilderness without coming to full realization of his own relative insignificance in Nature's

scheme of things. Harrington found it all to his liking and he frequently lifted his voice in song as he paddled. He had come to look upon this region with a sense of proprietorship. It was his by right of conquest; and one night in camp he explained all this to Chief, after the fashion in which lonely men are prone to address their dogs.

"All this is our very own wilderness, Chief," he declared. "It has known the tread of no other human feet before my own. Whatever my eyes behold has never before been viewed by man. It's our own wilderness by right of conquest."

The big dog, instead of listening with his usual dignified gravity, seemed inattentive and uneasy. This restlessness had been increasing for the past two days. Once, his hackle fur bristling and erect, his growls had caused Harrington to put inshore to investigate, only to find that the bar upon which Chief's attentions centered had been tracked up by wolves. Still, Chief should not have become unduly excited about the matter, since wolves were no novelty to him. Now he cast about, sometimes cocking his ears alertly, at others questing round with uplifted, quivering nose. Harrington knew that the night carried information to Chief on every vagrant breeze, stray ribbons of scent and delicate vibrations of sound, all too faint to register their impressions upon the dulled physical perceptions of man but conveying infallible messages to Chief. But from the dog's actions Harrington knew also that this

present uneasiness was occasioned by no actual scents or sounds. Rather it seemed that the night held some intangible mystery which the dog vaguely sensed and that he sought for some physical communication that would serve to confirm or to allay the apprehensions that assailed him.

Chief suddenly bristled and snarled, crouching close to the bank of the river as if tempted to enter it in search of an enemy. Harrington knew that in this instance the dog was acting upon some actual message. But the wind was wrong for him to catch a scent from the far side of the river so it must be some sound that had roused him to this demonstration.

Harrington strained his ears but could detect nothing but the gurgle of the current. An owl hooted from afar.

"Nothing to get excited about, Chief, I imagine," he said. "Sharp as your ears are they fool you sometimes. If the wind was right, so I knew that nose of yours was working, I'd take more notice. No chance in the world to delude your smelling apparatus, is there, boy?"

The next day Harrington held on up the river, only to turn off to ascend an inflowing creek. On the return journey in mid-afternoon Chief appeared on a high point that overlooked a bend in the creek. His hackle fur was erect and his action led Harrington to put ashore below the knob and climb to its crest. On its very tip reposed a single rock. The

heavy carpet of moss was too springy to reveal tracks other than those of some heavy animal with cutting hoofs. Just behind the rock the moss seemed to be flattened somewhat. Perhaps a bear had bedded there and had been routed by Chief. The edge of the forest closed in to within five yards of the open point, so dense that one's eyes could penetrate but a few feet into its moss-draped heart.

"Bear, likely and you ran so close on him before you noticed that it got you all riled up," Harrington said. "But you should be well acquainted with bears by now, seeing 'em every day."

For the next few days the country grew rougher, the current increasingly swift. Rapids necessitated several difficult portages.

"One day soon we'll find ourselves out of canoeing water," Harrington predicted.

Tumbled hills flanked the river and mountains loomed just ahead, the dark slit of a canyon showing. Just outside its mouth Harrington made camp. The sound of the falls was now a steady hollow roar and the earth seemed to throb to its thunderous vibrations.

"It's somewhere round the head of that canyon, Chief," Harrington said. "We can't go through, so we'll have to go round and see the country above the falls."

For answer Chief elevated his muzzle, filled his great lungs with air and sent the tribal howl of the huskies rolling across the hills. From far off in the

night there came an answer, a long-drawn howl, then a score of voices joining in the dismal chorus of the pack.

"Now I call that queer," Harrington said. "Wolves aren't given to running in packs at this time of year. They're all paired off and rearing their young."

With the first streak of dawn, Harrington set off to make a reconnoissance of the hills to the westward and after traveling for several miles he selected the crest of a low knob for an observation post and proceeded to scan the face of the hills that rose tier upon tier to the north. Numerous cross canyons broke toward that mighty main slash that bordered the falls. It would be feasible, in selecting a route of ascent, to swing somewhat more to the westward to avoid the heads of these side breaks. Harrington had about determined his route for the morrow when a lone wolf topped out on a distant ridge and stood sky-lined in the field of his glasses.

"There's one of your friends, Chief," he said.

A second animal joined the first and others continued to pop up on the sky-line until a score of wolves decorated the top of the ridge.

"First time I've known wolves to gang up at this season," Harrington said. Then he exclaimed in sheer amazement. An upright figure had appeared among the wolves. For the space of a minute this wild crew stood motionless. Then the human figure

moved along the crest of the ridge at a swift easy run, the pack surging close behind.

"Holy smoke! The Moccasin Telegraph wins in a walk. 'Ghost she lead the wolf pack that place!' Only those are Mackenzie huskies with so much wolf in them that they look the part. No wonder you were upset. Those were dog tracks, and they couldn't fool that nose of yours, Chief," Harrington said. "If that party has been flanking us, he was smart enough to keep the wind on us the best part of the time. You heard him one night and jumped him the next day on that point that overlooked the creek."

It was possible, Harrington reflected, that some remnant of a tribe dwelt here, their presence unknown even to the Nahanni people of the Liard. Not likely though. Anyway, he would investigate and report to the police.

"This isn't our own exclusive wilderness, after all, Chief," he said. "And we journeyed here to avoid the crowds."

The next day Harrington cached the main part of his outfit, selected sufficient equipment and supplies for a side trip, lashed them on his pack board and set forth to scale the hills to the north. When he topped out on the last rim he discovered that it was not the crest of the divide, as he had supposed, but the edge of a great rolling plateau or plain. The country beyond him was largely open and heavily carpeted with tundra.

He made camp in a timbered pocket near the rims, then set out across the open country. The heads of several minor canyons broke back into it, all of them draining to the main gorge. Harrington rounded these cuts and eventually turned to the east, intending to strike the river above the falls. He came out suddenly upon the rims of a depression, a sort of sink hole, the walls of which fell sheer for hundreds of feet. It was perhaps a mile in diameter and he could discover no outlet. Eventually he made out a narrow slit in the walls of its opposite extremity. No doubt this was the outlet, he decided, draining to the canyon below the falls.

Harrington lowered his gaze to the rock-strewn bottoms of the pocket. A score or more of white vaporous columns writhed aloft and for an instant he mistook them for the smoke rising from the cook fires of some unknown tribe. Then he chuckled, recognizing them for steam jets issuing from fissures in the rocky floor of the sink hole.

"Three rousing cheers for the Moccasin Telegraph. Ground, she burn that place," he said.

Far below him there were several pools, the thin vapor rising from their surfaces indicating that they were fed by hot springs. Suddenly the rocky bottoms below him seemed swarming with wolves.

"That is the hang-out of our friends, after all, Chief," he stated. "And a right good retreat it is. There's one of the gentlemen now."

An upright figure, garbed in buckskin, had ap-

peared among the crew of wolfish dogs. It ascended a rock above one of the warm pools and shed the buckskin garments, then executed a graceful dive into the pool.

Harrington swore softly in sheer amazement.

"Hell's bells! A woman—a white girl in this hole!"

The dogs clustered about the pool. One great creature took to the water and swam with the girl. Presently she emerged and sat on the rock, spreading her hair out to the sun.

Bit by bit Harrington examined the floor of the sink hole for further signs of human occupancy, but without success. When he put his glasses on the pool again the girl had disappeared. The dogs, too, seemed to have evaporated into the air. The scene which he had witnessed seemed unreal, the play of these tiny figures far below him like the movements of toy actors upon a stage that had vanished with the drawing of some invisible curtain. But presently he located one of the dogs asleep in the shade of a rock, another moving farther down the bottoms.

He returned to his camp and prepared his evening meal, but the work was automatic, his thoughts being engaged with the amazing discovery of the afternoon. Later, as he sat before his fire, the girl was still uppermost in his mind. The mystery surrounding this strange huntress fired his imagination. At one moment he pictured her as a Diana of the North, as wild and untamed as the pack with which she traveled; in more prosaic moments as the wife of

some fugitive who had fled to this far spot. But always, in each succeeding visualization, she was possessed of extreme beauty.

"You've been too much alone," he chided himself. "It's the same age-old affliction that leads lonely men to see beauty in an Eskimo squaw or a Bokongo belle. Ten to one she's a breed girl with a face that would stop a clock."

Nevertheless, these enticing mental images persisted and he seemed unable to picture the girl as anything other than the extreme of loveliness. He suddenly realized that the charm and beauty with which he had invested this wildling were those of another—the visualization of a face whose likeness ever hovered near the surface of his consciousness and all too frequently obsessed his thoughts. Angrily, he sought to brush the picture aside. The woman had gone out of his life completely. Why should she be ever present in his thoughts to harass him with a devastating sense of loss?

CHAPTER IV

HARRINGTON rigged his bed-net as a protection against the mosquitoes, indulging in little scraps of song as he worked. Chief seemed uneasy, which caused Harrington to wonder if some one of the girl's companions might be hanging round in the night to spy upon his camp. After retiring to the shelter of his bed-net sleep would not come to him for long, as he speculated as to the reason why a white woman should have come to this far place.

In the morning, as he prepared his meal, a low rumble from Chief caused Harrington to look out across the open country.

"Here comes one of our neighbors now," he said.

A human figure, followed by a horde of wolfish dogs, moved across the tundra toward his camp.

"It's the woman," Harrington pronounced as he focussed his glasses on the approaching figure. "Likely they've sent her as an emissary. I'd best tie you up before that swarm of dogs comes into camp."

At a distance of perhaps a hundred yards, the girl's voice reached Harrington as she gave certain commands to her dogs. To his surprise the wild crew, as if perfectly trained, remained there while

the woman held on toward his camp. She was attired in jacket and trousers of soft buckskin, her feet shod with moose-hide moccasins, and she carried a stout bow while a quiver containing a dozen heavy hunting arrows was suspended from her shoulder. She moved with the lithe unstudied grace of a wild thing.

When within six feet of Harrington she came to a halt and surveyed him. His chief emotion was one of profound surprise at the incredible beauty of her, coupled with the feeling that he was not gazing upon mere physical perfection but that the woman before him was possessed of some quality which he was unable to define. It was as if some loveliness of the spirit glowed through and illumined the flesh. From some unknown source an explanation of her came to his mind—utter naturalness. Vaguely, he was aware that beauty and utter naturalness were largely unrelated. While his conscious mental processes were groping for a definition of her physical charm his subconsciousness, leaping ahead, had fastened unerringly upon the keynote of her character. Without knowing why, in that first instant of meeting, he was definitely aware that this ravishing creature could not be gauged by any conventional standard. The gray eyes that looked back into his own were alight with eager friendliness. Her lips were half parted and her breath came a bit rapidly as if from excitement at this meeting. All this in a space of

seconds. Then she spoke, and her first words were equally unsettling.

"Sing to me," she requested.

Harrington, startled and confused by this strange greeting, felt a warm tide of red creep up under his tan.

"I'm sorry," she breathed in swift concern, as if instantly divining the change in him. "Shouldn't I have asked that? There are so many things that I don't quite—don't quite know about. But you sang so often as you paddled and it did something queer to me in here." She rested an indicative palm on her breast. "It made me feel all nice and warm inside. That's why I asked."

So she had followed him, Harrington reflected, recalling Chief's uneasiness for two weeks past. The gray eyes were gravely questioning and there was no trace of coquetry in tone or manner. Rather it seemed a simple statement of fact, made with the same unaffected candor with which a child might describe its emotions. Also, it was conceivable that after a period spent in such devastating isolation the sound of a human voice, even though reaching her ears only in scraps of songs, might have served as a reminder to link her to the outside world and the life that she had left behind.

Harrington turned his slow amused smile upon her, and the gray eyes quickened to light in response to it, as if she divined that her explanation had sufficed.

"Quite all right," he said. "But it startled me somewhat for the reason that most people, when I break forth into vocal effort, beg me to desist instead of requesting an encore. So I usually reserve such demonstrations for occasions when there's no one within earshot."

The concern had receded from her eyes with his smiling answer, and they were once more softly shining as her gaze traveled over his big frame in frank approval. As if that topic had been settled she launched abruptly into another.

"Tell me—would you say that I was very good to look at?"

Again there was no trace of coquetry apparent in her tone or manner. She seemed to await his answer with frank and eager curiosity but as if not quite certain of the verdict.

"Very," Harrington answered gravely.

"As beautiful as other women you have known?" she persisted.

"One of the loveliest I have ever seen," he said, and wondered why he had even qualified the statement. She was quite the most beautiful creature of his experience.

"Oh! That's nice," she breathed. "I had hoped you would think that. Pan has always told me so, but that is because he is very fond of me and I wondered if others would think that about me."

"Pan!" Harrington echoed.

"Yes," she laughed. "He calls himself that for

the reason that he is the god of this particular stretch of forest." Then she added, with a touch of complacency. "I think myself that I am far prettier than Tanlika."

"And just who is Tanlika?" he inquired, vaguely speculating as to whether or not Tanlika might be a fancied rival.

"My nurse—a native woman," the girl informed. "Her skin is quite dark, not white like mine."

This naïve explanation as to the differing degrees of pigmentation in her own fair skin and Tanlika's dark hide as the chief distinguishing mark between their different types of beauty amused Harrington, but oddly enough it did not surprise him. He some way felt that he was through with being surprised, that the girl herself was so surprising that everything which she might say or do, coming from her, would seem quite natural. He sensed that she was so unusual that his own usual reactions, as if aware of their futility to serve, had suspended their functions.

"I'm glad you've come," she said. "Sometimes it was lonely waiting for you."

"For me?" Harrington echoed. It flashed to his mind that she had mistaken him for some messenger whose arrival with news or supplies had been expected.

"Yes, who else?" she dropped to a seat on the ground and motioned him to do likewise. "Talk to me," she said. "Tell me of people you have known

and places you have been. Just anything. I haven't had any one to talk with in ever so long a time."

It was natural that she should feel a consuming hunger to hear any shred of news from the life she had known and had left behind. Her request reminded Harrington of the customary greeting between two members of the small and isolated tribe of Iklut that ranges in family groups on a tributary of the Upper Liard. When Iklut meets Iklut on stream or trail one of them gives utterance to a few guttural syllables, which, translated, mean "Where have you been and how have you fared? Did you kill many moose and did you take much fur? Do all of your children still live and have you any new ones? Did the fish run well?" and so on. In other words, it means "Tell me everything that you can think of." The one who first utters the greeting, beating the other to the draw, so to speak, expects to be told in detail all that has happened or that might have happened since last they met. Thereafter he will relate in turn all that has befallen him.

Harrington, seething with questions that clamored for utterance, decided that having been fairly caught he must live up to Iklut etiquette, so he acceded to her request. Tanlika, the native woman, must be an Iklut, and the girl had acquired this mode of greeting, he thought.

"Things are running along pretty much as usual," he said. He recited the details of several important

events that had occurred just prior to his departure from the realm of the printed page.

"Yes. Go on," she urged, when he would have paused. The dogs, taking advantage of her abstraction, had edged closer until they were ringed around Harrington and the girl. They investigated the man with explosive sniffs and made tentative acquaintance with the great Chief, tethered to a near-by tree. One magnificent female husky, Queen, crowded close to her mistress; others were addressed by the girl as Wolf, Eric, and by various other titles. Harrington was amazed at the lack of quarreling and snarling among them, for he knew the husky as essentially a savage, prone to indulge in murderous disputes at every opportunity; that even team mates of long standing are seldom left by their owners except when tethered beyond reach of one another, lest they avail themselves of the opportunity to settle old feuds or to start new ones. He commented upon this.

"Yes. We have trained them from puppyhood, never permitting them to quarrel among themselves, picking the best-natured animals out of each generation and eliminating the incorrigibles," she explained. "But do go on. Tell me more."

Realizing something of what every shred of news must mean to her, Harrington recited everything of recent interest that he could recall, important or trivial, ranging from international affairs to personalities. Throughout his discourse the girl listened

with intense interest. The gray eyes that looked back into his own were deep pools of expression that revealed every ripple of emotional currents behind them. After perhaps an hour she rose to her feet.

"It has been perfect. If you only knew! But I must go now."

He suddenly realized that she was making her exit without further leave-taking, the abruptness of it as unexpected as had been her opening salutation.

"But wait!" he called after her. It had come to him that if they parted now, she would leave behind only the disturbing memory of her presence and the unsolved riddle of her. It seemed imperative that he should unravel the meaning of her presence here—that he must arrive at some solution that would clarify for him the mystery of her anomalous personality. Armed with a bow and followed by her wolfish pack, she had come to him in the heart of a region that was believed to be uninhabited. She seemed the very spirit of the wilderness. Her woodcraft excelled that of a native, yet she gave every evidence of having enjoyed the best advantages that the world had to offer. Her incredible loveliness and the individual mannerisms of speech that proclaimed her a personality, her sheer unusualness in all respects would cause her to be marked as one woman in a million in any gathering of civilized society.

"Wait! You must tell me something of yourself. Who are you and why are you here?"

"There is not much to tell about me," she said,

turning back to him. "I'm Lynne. Pan sometimes calls me the Nymph, a waif of the woods, because he found me in the forest."

"But I must see you again!" Harrington insisted, knowing that she was again on the verge of departure, as if believing that these few words had explained her adequately.

"Oh! But surely," she agreed in mild astonishment, as if further meetings between them were to be expected as a matter of course. "I'll meet you here to-morrow."

Then she was gone, moving across the tundra at an easy running gait, with the pack swinging close behind.

Throughout the day Harrington's restlessness increased. At first, piqued at her seeming assumption that he would await her pleasure indefinitely, he had decided to move camp and let her follow if she could. Then, fearing that she might not find him, he decided to remain in his present location. His former intention of seeking out a route through the maze of side canyons to some point from which he could view the falls from below, or failing that, to strike the river above them, had vanished. Instead, he remained in camp and shaved for the first time in a month. With the coming of night he sought his bed, but sleep would not come to him. He stared into the dancing flames of his fire, his thoughts engaged with his visitor of the morning. Pan! The fellow had certainly arrogated a great deal unto himself to

assume the title and to fancy himself vested with the powers of the fabled God of the Forest. The names she had given him, patently fictitious, no doubt had been adopted to accord with the environment. Was this Pan a fugitive or a member of some band of wandering prospectors who had kept their pilgrimage to these parts a secret? In either case, love was the keynote of it—the reason for her presence here. Villiers had been right. Nothing save unrequited love could have driven Harrington to abandon his profession and his prospects and to seek the seclusion of the wilderness, much after the fashion in which a wounded bear seeks solitude until its hurts are healed. And, in reverse equation, nothing save a vast love would have led a woman to forsake her former walks of life and follow her man into the wilderness to endure such devastating isolation. It worked both ways, he reflected bitterly, and was conscious of a growing envy toward this so-called Pan. What manner of man was he to have inspired a love so great in a creature who could have had her pick from the world of men? Perhaps he might be somewhat entitled to the name that he had adopted. This reflection brought no particular cheer to the man who had conceived it. Instead it added to his own sense of bitter loss.

At last he slept, only to be roused by a low whine from Chief. Gray shapes slid silently beneath the trees. Harrington saw Chief renewing former acquaintance with the big husky, Queen. Then, her

approach as soundless as that of her dogs, the girl was standing there by his dying fire.

"I couldn't sleep without seeing you again," she said. "And to-morrow seemed so far away."

An hour before Harrington had wondered somewhat testily if this man of the wilderness would be so selfish as to refuse permission for the girl to meet him here on the morrow. Now, inconsistently enough, he wondered with equal acerbity what the man was about to permit her to wander alone through this wild region in the dead of night; but he was thankful, nevertheless, for the combination of circumstances that had made the visit possible.

"Talk to me again," she urged, sitting by the fire as the flame leaped up through the fresh wood. "Tell me more things."

Again, realizing what every bit of news must mean to her, he acceded to her request, withholding his own questions. And again the girl drank in his every word as if she would never tire of listening. After perhaps two hours she stretched her muscles and yawned. Ordinarily this gaping of a human face, particularly that of a woman, would have impressed Harrington with a sense of its unattractiveness. But in this instance, as in all else that she did, the very unselfconsciousness of the act relieved it of any offense—or probably for the reason that even a contortion which would enhance the unattractiveness of any ordinary countenance was incapable of impairing this creature's perfection. Harrington

ton was amusedly reminded of the instinctive actions of a tired kitten. Lynne's smile sleepily answered his own.

"My eyes are getting heavy," she confessed. "I didn't sleep a wink last night and have been traveling at a run all day. If I go to sleep now, will you promise to talk to me to-morrow?"

"For hours on end," he promised, believing that she was about to depart.

From the case that contained her arrows she extracted a head-net, closely woven from some fibrous material, and a pair of buckskin gloves. Adjusting the net about her head as a protection against mosquitoes and donning the gloves, she curled up contentedly before the fire, her head pillowed on one arm.

"Good night," she murmured.

"But you can't stay here!" Harrington protested, aware, even as he spoke, of the absurdity of conforming to civilized conventions in this far spot. This girl, in any event, would formulate her own conventions and subscribe to no others. Of that he was quite certain, and her latest act was proof of the surmise.

"Why won't you let me stay here with you?" she coaxed.

"But what will they think?" he queried lamely, with the age-old apprehension of the civilized human lest his actions offend the dictates of society, though Harrington's apprehension was solely for the girl.

"What would they think if you failed to return to-night—Pan and Tanlika and the others?"

"Oh! But there is no one now—just me," she said, rising to a sitting posture. "No one since the snowslide caught poor Tanlika."

"You can't mean that you are alone in here!" Harrington exclaimed incredulously. "Impossible!"

"I'm alone," she assured him. "And have been for months. Pan left in November to go to the Yukon slope for supplies, expecting to return in February. Then in December the snowslide caught Tanlika. Ever since I've been waiting here, hoping that Pan would come back; but he never has."

Harrington was swept by a sudden rage against the man who had inflicted this thing upon her. He had a swift mental picture of this girl living alone through screeching blizzards and the even more terrifying silences after storms had passed, the long gloomy months of the sub-Arctic night. Yet, somehow he felt that she had been subject to no panics; great loneliness, perhaps, and grief, but back of it all the calm self-assurance of her own ability to see the situation through to the end without flinching. Nevertheless, it must have been a dreadful ordeal.

"My God!" he breathed. "It seems impossible."

"It was lonely," she agreed. "Sometimes I felt that he would never come back to me. Then it seemed that life wouldn't be worth living without him. I would have to keep my mind upon other things. So

I've just kept on waiting, even after the allotted time was up."

"The time was up?" he echoed uncomprehendingly.

"When he left he told me that if he failed to return in six months, we would know that he had died on the trail and that Tanlika would take me to Father Ruvierre. Do you know him?"

"No. But I've heard the name," said Harrington. Ruvierre! Doubtless he was one of the bearded priests, but Harrington could not recall at which of the twelve posts on the interior trail he might be stationed at the time.

"So he knew in advance that he might not return," he stated rather than asked. That smacked of deliberate desertion.

"Oh, yes. He said that he was a very old man to be traveling winter trails and that on some of his trips he would fail to return; that I must not grieve but remember that he had outlived his allotted span of years long since. He always has told me that before starting on a long trip for supplies."

The man, then, had been neither husband nor lover, Harrington mused; her father, perhaps, or a guardian. It was filial love that she accorded him. Harrington reflected upon the queer manifestations of the Moccasin Telegraph. The Old Man of the North, then, had not been a myth but an actual character. Primitive peoples, far removed from civilization, living close to the earth and Nature,

told strange things sometimes; mostly superstitious rot, of course, and much of it that later proved to contain a grain of truth might be traced to material sources—a strange trail, the ashes of a long-dead camp fire, the mark of a paddleblade in the mud bottom of some shallow where a phantom canoe was known to have passed, any one of a hundred ways by which the knowledge might have been gained naturally. But there was something else—allied, no doubt, to that faculty possessed by animals, as evidenced by a dog's knowledge of the nearness of human presence in an isolated region and where no scent or sound could have conveyed the information over the paths of physical senses. Harrington had seen it among many primitive races about the world.

"So won't you let me stay with you?" she coaxed.

"Poor, lonely little stray," he said. "I didn't know. Of course you stay with me until I turn you into the safe keeping of Father Ruvierre."

She had curled up again before the fire.

"You take my blankets and bed-net," he instructed. "And I'll bunk here by the fire."

But she had already slipped into a sound slumber, her head pillowed on one doubled arm. He covered her with one of his two blankets. From the shelter of his bed-net he watched her sleeping there, surrounded by the members of her faithful pack.

CHAPTER V

HARRINGTON, in a week of close association, had learned something of Lynne's history. Even now it seemed incredible that throughout her life the only human contacts of her experience had consisted of association with a native woman and with a man whose real name she had never heard—a man who claimed to have found her, a wailing infant, in a miserable hut of poles and mud. It had been Harrington's experience that a life even of semi-isolation, or of group isolation, tended to foster extreme ignorance and narrow, suspicious intolerance. Lynne, on the contrary, seemed a veritable reservoir of knowledge and her viewpoint was so elastic that she had formed few fixed notions as to rules by which all human conduct should be regulated. She was therefore able to absorb a new thought without the least difficulty, since it was not necessary to dislodge a previous conviction before a new idea could take root. In a theological sense she would have been classified as purely pagan. It was not that she had no knowledge of religion, for she was intimately posted upon the precepts and chief characters of all of the world's great religions as well as upon many

that were more obscure. But she viewed them all impersonally, much as a student of mythology or totemism might find his researches of vast interest yet without thought of subscribing to any single one or set of such beliefs by which to map out his own existence.

So also was it with matters historical. A comprehensive picture of the rise of man, the great characters of history, the titanic clash of nations, the bloody struggles of races for survival or supremacy, the whole story of mankind trooped across the pages of her mind as vividly as the glittering details of a circus parade recur to the thoughts of the average youth. She spoke of characters dead three thousand years with the same admiration or disapproval with which she commented upon men now living, which for a time puzzled Harrington. But eventually he understood. Her vast accumulation of knowledge was, as to application, entirely vicarious, even to a greater degree than that of some bookish monk, for the latter, even in the seclusion of his monastery, could not avoid some echo of the passing show and forming some impression of the present, no matter how terrifying, by which to evaluate the past. It was not that Lynne failed in knowledge of history as grouped in contemporary periods, for she did not, and she viewed the whole sweep of it in correct chronological sequence. It was merely that, having no contact with present affairs by which to gauge the past, she looked upon both with the same

relative detachment. Present history was as far removed from her own experience as the past, and as a consequence the conquests of the Roman legions and the doings of the Pharaohs were as real to her as the activities of present-day Americans.

Harrington found her insatiable desire for knowledge readily understandable. The ordinary youth, he thought, alive to the colorful panorama of his own world and with a rich variety of human associations upon which to draw, views his own present surroundings and personal activities as of far more importance than the study of bygone ages and of characters long since dead. This last is imposed upon him, a dry and arduous duty, by his elders. But the actual world as he knows it, while of extreme interest, is not romance, and he seeks his romance in the fairy tales of worlds that are fanciful. Lynne, deprived of those contacts, had sought her romance in tales of the actual world, which to her was fairyland. Thus Harrington could readily account for the intensity with which she had poured through the many volumes that had been transported laboriously to this far spot.

The civilized idea of what naturalness in a human consists of, Harrington reflected, is actually the composite picture of many individuals who deviate the least from the group-standard erected through a host of conventions that are imposed by society. It requires a lifetime of suppression of naturalness and of equally severe schooling in artificiality to

compress any human into the conventional mold that is society's gauge of human naturalness. It follows logically, then, that the resulting product is highly artificial. Harrington had heard the term naturalness applied in the most complimentary sense to many a man and woman, all highly artificial. Looking across at Lynne, positively the most natural being that he had known, it occurred to him that society would pronounce her an extremely unnatural person.

He laughed softly at the reflection. And Lynne, opening her eyes instantly, laughed joyously in response. Mellow, sweet-toned and bubbling, her laughter never failed to penetrate some inner recess of his being and to infuse into his every cell a curious delight, as a probing ray of sunshine, following a storm, illuminates the gloomy recesses of the forest and wrings a piping note of joy from the tiny unseen life that lurks there. There was some odd elusive quality about her laughter as there was about her beauty, seemingly indefinable, but Harrington thought that he had arrived at a satisfactory definition of it. The laughter of most individuals of civilized society, except at rare intervals, was largely forced or strained—artificial. Lynne's, on the contrary, was an unaffected outpouring of pure and undiluted joy, similar to the bubbling song of a golden-throated bird at mating time. Naturally his subconsciousness responded eagerly to it after he had

heard so much of laughter to which his own response had been equally forced and artificial.

The girl slept once more. She had that quality, possessed by most wild things, of rousing from slumber with every faculty alert and of dropping as swiftly into untroubled sleep. As Harrington watched her sleeping there, surrounded by her pack, one dog raised its head, another and another emulating the example, until every head was elevated. As if roused by the same mysterious current, the girl, too, lifted her head. For the space of a minute the group held that listening attitude as if expecting some message out of the night. Harrington could hear only the usual sounds, the rumble of the falls, the ripple of water and the soft sighing of the wind in the trees. An owl hooted and received an answer from a distant mate. Then one canine head was lowered back to earth, another and another. The girl pillowed her head upon her doubled arm and slept. On a half dozen occasions during the few nights of their association he had witnessed this tableau of listening. What did the night carry to the ears of Lynne and her canine escorts that failed to reach his own?

He slept and when next he waked it was to find that Lynne and the dogs had departed. This was the third such instance of their vanishing into the night. On the first occasion he had worried considerably but she had returned before dawn. The next time she had not reappeared until noon. Harrington

ton knew that she would not remain away for long, as they had planned to start in the morning on the long journey in quest of Father Ruvierre. But there was something about it all that he could not quite comprehend. The girl and her canine guards seemed ever alert and listening, as if sensing some menace that lurked somewhere about; and these mysterious midnight wanderings of the girl and her pack. Of what did she go in search during the dark hours of the night?

With this reflection he dropped to sleep. Presently he sensed a benign hovering presence, tenderly ardent lips seeking his own, while in his dawning consciousness there seemed to float the vision of a face—the face that had haunted him for so long a time. As he wrenched himself back to wakefulness a soft palm, held lingeringly against his cheek, was swiftly withdrawn. Of that he was quite certain. The rest, of course, he must have dreamed. He opened his eyes to find Lynne sitting there beside him.

“I just wanted to touch you, some way,” she said. “I know now why Queen always wants to be close to me and to rest her head on my knee. She’s perfectly miserable when I push her away.”

“Oh, it’s you,” Harrington murmured drowsily. “Better you catchem nap now, little nighthawk. Tomorrow plenty long tam no can sleep.”

Early in the morning they started. From the edge of the plateau the girl turned for one last ling-

ering survey of her domain. Then she led the way down over the rims. They angled to the southeast toward the spot where Harrington's canoe was cached below the mouth of the canyon. Presently Lynne dropped into the head of a branch canyon that led quarteringly down toward their goal. Harrington observed a certain uneasiness among the dogs as they advanced, their attention seemingly drawn ahead although the wind was at their backs. When they would have spurted ahead, the girl held them in check by a low command. She was inspecting the ground in her path. Harrington had been treated to several instances of her marvellous ability as a tracker. Every depression in the springy moss, every dislodged stick and stone came in for her casual scrutiny. She read the signs of the forest floor as readily as the student deciphers the contents of a printed page.

Queen growled, her hackle fur bristling. Wolf and Eric made a move to forge ahead. Then suddenly the girl gave a sharp order; "Go hunt—Go hunt!" and accompanied the words with a forward sweep of her arm. The pack was off like a shot, a silent, deadly crew, darting round a bend in the sharply pitching floor of the canyon. Lynne, instead of holding to her course, veered to come out on a shoulder that overlooked the bend round which the dogs had disappeared.

"What's it all about, Lynne?" Harrington inquired.

"Your enemy has come back," she informed him.

Before he could quite comprehend the meaning of this, they came out on the rim and there, a hundred yards below them, a strange scene unrolled before Harrington's incredulous gaze. On a huge rock that had fallen to the floor of the canyon stood a man armed only with a club. Its height was too great to permit of the dogs scaling it, of which the man seemed well aware, for he stood calmly enough.

"My enemy?" Harrington queried, unable quite to grasp the significance of it. He turned slowly away from the scene below and faced Lynne to receive her explanation. Instead he seized her arms, forestalling her purpose, for she was fitting a heavy arrow to her bow. Her eyes, in which he had seen reflected various emotions ranging from quick anger to tenderness, were now the cold gray of the moss agate. For the first time he glimpsed the steel that backed the velvet of her loveliness. He knew that save for his timely intervention she would have driven that arrow through the man below them without a word of warning—realized it with something of a shock.

"Lynne! Why would you do a thing like that?" he demanded. "You meant to kill him!"

She made a gesture of assent, attempting to disengage her arms. But Harrington held her. She read the disapproval in his eyes and the chill in her own gradually melted.

"But he came here to kill you," she said defensively.

"What possible reason could he have for wishing to kill me?" Harrington asked incredulously. "I've never laid eyes on the man in my life."

"I don't know the reason—only the fact that he did," Lynne declared. "He followed you into this country to kill you. I watched him following you day after day. He skulked along behind you, examining tracks round your night camps after you had moved on in the mornings. He never rounded a bend in the stream without first peering round a point. The wind held mostly down river, blowing from you to him, so your dog couldn't wind him and warn you. When it changed he dropped back for miles. He built fires only at night and then only small ones, well sheltered. Then one night when you were camped on the windward bank, he passed upstream close to the opposite shore. Your dog heard him and you peered across, but it was too dark for you to see him."

Harrington recalled Chief's actions that night.

"He cached his canoe in the brush and waited for you next day," the girl continued. "But before you reached him you turned off to paddle up the course of a creek. He followed and chose a high point overlooking a bend and lay there behind a rock with his rifle, waiting to kill you as you came back downstream."

Harrington also recalled Chief's demonstration

upon returning to that point overlooking the bend in the creek and his own subsequent investigation, resulting in the discovery that the moss behind the rock was pressed flat. He had decided at the time that a bear had been bedded there. Evidently, at his approach, the man had slipped back into the cover of the dense moss-draped forest that crowded close behind the rock on the point.

"But don't you see, Lynne, that any man would be curious when he found that another human was preceding him into a country that he had believed was uninhabited?" Harrington argued, the situation dawning upon him. "He's not my enemy, girl. I never laid eyes on him before in my life. Naturally he'd try to have a look at me before revealing his own presence in the country. If he had meant harm to me, he could have potted me long since."

"He would have killed you but for me," Lynne insisted. "I moved in close behind him and told him that if he so much as turned his head before throwing his rifle over the bluff into the river I'd kill him. After I heard his gun strike the water in that deep rocky bend, I made him go back to his canoe, still keeping out of his sight, and told him to start down-river and keep going."

That listening attitude of the girl and her dogs of nights that had so intrigued Harrington, her nightly excursions with the pack, were now readily comprehensible. The dogs had somehow sensed that some human was in the region and Lynne had been wait-

ing for them to locate the intruder by some actual scent or sound and lead her to him. A chill tingle crept along Harrington's spine as he realized the purpose of those nightly excursions and pictured Lynne and her savage pack prowling silently through the forest in the dead of night in search of this fancied enemy. That his enmity and sinister intent were but fanciful, existing only in Lynne's imagination, Harrington did not doubt. In her inexperience she had put a sinister interpretation upon actions that were merely the exercising of a very natural curiosity and caution. Besides, there was no possible motive that could have induced this perfect stranger to follow Harrington into uncharted wilderness with deadly intent. He dropped a kindly hand on Lynne's shoulder and explained his idea of the situation.

"Likely it was all a mistake, Lynne," he concluded.

"There was no mistake," she insisted.

"Anyway, we'll have to get him down off that rock," Harrington said. "After you talk with him, you'll probably find him a decent sort of chap."

The girl demurred no further but followed Harrington as he picked his way to the floor of the canyon and rounded the bend to address the man on the rock.

"Sorry our dogs treed you," he apologized. "They're not accustomed to meeting up with strangers. What do you want in here?"

"Who has the right to ask?" the man demanded. "Do you own this country and operate the toll gate?"

"Hardly that," Harrington laughed. "Lynne, order off those dogs." Then, again addressing the man, "Only a natural curiosity as to what brought you here," he added, by way of explanation.

"Well, if it will do you any good to know, I was aiming to prospect these creeks," the man returned. "But you effectively blocked that when you all disarmed me and turned me adrift without any way to kill meat. I didn't have enough grub left to run me back to the outside, so I slipped up here again to try and locate your grub cache, with an idea of helping myself."

In every new country there is some one offense that ranks worse than murder in the eyes of the inhabitants. Always it has to do with some item upon which the life of those inhabitants chiefly hangs. In desert countries it is the tampering with another's water supply. In the West, where every man's life was largely dependent upon his mount, the unpardonable offense was the stealing of another's horse; in the north the purloining of food that belonged to another. Communities that would look with more or less indulgence upon the killing of one man by another in a personal feud would give short shrift to the man who violated the particular code of the country—stealing of water, horse or food, according to locality.

That this stranger should frankly confess his

intention of committing the unpardonable sin of the North amused rather than angered Harrington, for it substantiated his own theory. Deprived of his gun, upon which all wilderness travelers relied for food, the man naturally felt that his grievance was sufficiently great to justify even his rifling the grub cache of the parties who had inflicted the deprivation upon him.

"It wouldn't have worked any great hardship on you all, with tons of meat in the hills for the shooting," he said. "Not that I was anyways worried about it, even if you'd starved to death, after what you'd done to me," he added frankly.

"It was all a misunderstanding, I'm afraid," Harrington said. "But we'll do the best we can to rectify it. We've plenty of grub to run the three of us back to the Liard, where you can maybe pick up a gun from the Nahanni, and we're starting for the outside. We'll feed you back to the Liard if you'll trail along with us."

"There don't seem much of any other way out for me," the man said. "It'll knock me out of a full season of prospecting these creeks after a long winter's mush coming in. But it's my only way out."

He gave his name as McNair and they proceeded on down country toward Harrington's cache. McNair evidently felt that since it was through their interference that he had been deprived of means of feeding himself, he owed them no thanks for their offer and he expressed none. Neither did he seem

to harbor malice, after listening to Harrington's explanation.

"Likely it did look suspicious to you all, my scouting round thataway," he said. "But when I found there was folks ahead of me in this country, where I'd figured there was no humans whatever, why I thought I'd better get a squint at you to see what sort of customers you were before you found out I was anywheres in the country."

This fitted substantially with the idea that Harrington had formed of the matter. Also he was relieved that McNair seemed to believe that Lynne and himself had come into the country together. It eliminated the necessity for explanation that might prove awkward. McNair was powerfully built but seemed somewhat weakened and stopped on several occasions to rest, which he explained on the score that he had placed himself on short rations since the loss of his gun and that he had already traveled far that day.

Lynne held herself somewhat aloof, saying little. Harrington noted that her eyes, when trained on the stranger, were the cold gray of stormy northern seas.

"What do you find wrong about him, Lynne girl?" Harrington queried.

"His eyes—the tones of his voice," she informed. "They're like those of a treacherous dog." She seemed surprised that these things were not equally apparent to Harrington. But Harrington's ears could catch no sinister note, nothing that was even

unusual, in the tones of McNair's voice. On several occasions, though, he fancied that he detected a strange intensity lurking in the depths of the man's eyes beneath their candid stare, as a cannibal fish lurks deep beneath the placid surface waters of a lagoon, unseen save for an occasional menacing quiver as he sights possible prey and prepares to strike. But probably that was merely Harrington's imagination working along the lines of Lynne's suggestion.

"He has a strange glitter deep down in his eyes at times, maybe," he conceded. "I've seen it in the eyes of other men that have been too much alone. These old prospectors that live by themselves for years on end develop strange notions. Sometimes they imagine that they are being followed by other men who are waiting for them to make the big strike. They take to watching their back track. Or they get other hallucinations—and their eyes go queer. On the Alaskan side they say of such a man that he has missed one too many boats—meaning that he's gone queer from being too much alone and that he'd best take a boat for the outside where there is plenty of human companionship before his mind snaps from loneliness. Maybe it's that that flickers up in his eyes now and then."

Lynne murmured her disbelief of this solution.

In the late afternoon they reached Harrington's cache. Lynne promptly set off on what was apparently a casual prowl of the vicinity. It was decided

to drop off downstream to make camp at the head of the first piece of bad water that necessitated a portage.

"My canoe is roomy enough for the two of us," Harrington said. "But not for three. Where's yours?"

"A couple of hundred yards down below," McNair stated. "I'll put off when I see you all take to the water."

The man moved downstream while Harrington and Lynne stowed their effects in the canoe and shoved off in the current. McNair was waiting some distance below and they saw his birch-bark craft take to the water and lead the way down the river.

"He seems pretty well starved down and weakened," Harrington commented. "We'll have to full-feed him until he's back on his feet."

"He's neither starved nor weak. He is lying," Lynne contradicted. "He had plenty of food. He has cached it somewhere."

"Lynne, you're a lovely little savage," Harrington commented by way of answer.

"I'm not a savage!" she flared, and bestowed a hot angry glance upon him over her shoulder.

"Course not," Harrington conceded.

"I scouted round your cache," she said, and Harrington recalled the fact. "He had visited it several times in the past few days. If he was as weak and hungry as he pretends, he would have eaten instead of leaving it untouched. If his object had been to

steal it, as he claims, he could have stolen it long since."

"But what other object could he have?" Harrington argued plausibly. "Anyway, Lynne, even if he's inclined to be dangerous, which I doubt, he's out of luck with the odds two to one against him, to say nothing of twenty-odd fighting dogs. Without a gun, his claws are pretty effectually clipped for the present, so rest easy."

But Lynne did not rest easy. Instead, when the three of them spread their beds round the fire, she was decidedly restless. McNair asked Harrington if he had found any promising colors in the country and for a space the two men indulged in the exchanges that are customary whenever and wherever two members of the prospecting fraternity foregather; reminiscences of an earlier day, of mining camps that they had known, tales of old strikes that are history and the prospects of new strikes that will make it.

Lynne seemed asleep and presently the two men drifted into silence and slumber claimed Harrington. An hour later McNair, twisting silently in his blankets, lifted his head silently and peered about him. He found himself gazing into a pair of eyes in which there was an implacable hostility. Lynne did not trouble to answer his sleepy smile but rose abruptly and removed her sleeping robe to the dark shelter of the forest, beyond the circle of light cast by the fire. There she slept fitfully, but whenever

McNair made the slightest move a score of canine heads out in the darkness were lifted and as many pair of eyes watched him. On the instant the girl, too, was awake and watching him. The man seemed to know that this battery of hostile eyes regarded him bleakly from the night. Eventually the fire flickered low, then died, so that Lynne could no longer see the sleeping figures in the camp.

Harrington opened his eyes to find Lynne sitting beside him. He could hear the breathing of dogs on all sides of him—the bodyguard watching over him through the dark hours of the night.

He reached out a hand for hers and pressed it in recognition of this unnecessary vigil. And at the contact a light smouldered in the eyes that looked down into his own, but the gloom prevented his reading the message. Their gray depths kindled with that tender brooding fire that comes only to the eyes of the woman who mothers her babe in arms or is herself, actually or in her divine imaginings, held close in the arms of her lover. And in Lynne's breast there was something of both. This splendid male creature, as if in answer to a prayer, had come paddling into her wilderness, singing his way into her lonely heart. Every fiber of her womanhood yearned toward the man that he was. And just now she was also mothering the trusting infant in him—guarding it against a watchful and deadly menace that feigned sleep there in the person of McNair.

She was preparing breakfast when the men rose in

the first gray light of dawn. Below the camp the river narrowed, confined between high walls, and poured abruptly down across a series of minor cascades. It necessitated a half-mile portage and a difficult one, as Harrington had discovered on his up-trip. The heights above the walls were smothered in a forest so dense and with such low-hanging limbs and tangled down-timber jams as to render penetration impossible if a man were burdened with a canoe or even a bulky pack, unless he cut out a portage trail. This made it necessary to traverse the sloping benches of the upper walls themselves, the footing somewhat precarious but affording a more open means of passage.

Harrington led the way, a heavy load lashed on his packboard, his upturned canoe balanced above his head. McNair followed, with Lynne bringing up the rear, each carrying a pack. They came out below the boiling narrows. There was a stretch of smooth water ahead. Two hundred yards below commenced another string of rapids, but they offered no serious obstacles to an expert canoeist.

"Lynne, you stay here and catch a nap while McNair and myself bring on the rest of the outfit," Harrington suggested.

The girl demurred but Harrington insisted.

"Only two light loads left," he pointed out. "Even as weak as McNair is, we can make it without a quiver. I'll take the big end of it. Could pack it all myself, except for the bulk."

His reference to McNair's condition was occasioned by the fact that the man had tottered weakly under his heavy pack in crossing difficult bits of going on the first trip down.

Harrington deposited the canoe with the prow in the water, ready to be launched, and stowed their effects therein. By a significant movement of his eyes he indicated his rifle which he had placed in the canoe, believing that her custody of the weapon during his absence would reassure her as to the improbability of any act of hostility on the part of McNair. She acquiesced but her anxious gaze followed the backs of the retreating pair.

Back again at the camp, Harrington amiably insisted upon assuming at least three-fourths of the remaining duffle, then inverted McNair's canoe above his head. McNair took the lead without a word.

In the difficult spots where footing was to be obtained only upon narrow sloping shelves between intermediate rims, McNair, apparently, was not quite sure of his balance and on several occasions he tottered and half-turned, placing a hand on the moss-grown slope to steady himself.

He cautiously threaded a narrow sloping bench that led round beneath a bluff. A dozen feet below this was another and equally narrow pitching shelf whose lower extremity obscured the view of what lay below. McNair shrank back from the edge, half-turned to face it and reached out a steadying hand behind to balance himself. Then, without change of

expression or shifting of his pack, the out-turn and steadying motion resolved itself into the drive of a powerful body, launched straight at Harrington with the smooth certainty of a tiger's spring. Harrington, his arms cocked to support the canoe above his head, received the full smash of a mighty fist upon the point of his jaw, and as his relaxing arms allowed the canoe to drop upon his head, a foot was planted against his ribs and a powerful thrust propelled him over the brink.

McNair heard the crash of his landing on the narrow sloping shelf below, an interval and then another crash of a falling body and the wreck of a frail canoe striking some other obstruction together, a final thud, then silence. He could spare no time to work his way down and make certain that Harrington had been catapulted over all of the intervening narrow shelves and his body precipitated over the final plunge to the rock-strewn rapids below. Time enough to make sure of that later. His cue now was to hasten to the girl who waited below and to secure the rifle before she became aware of the fact that Harrington was not following close behind him.

He met Chief coming up, the big dog having been sent by the girl on the trail of his master as soon as the two had left her sight. But Chief, pausing to harry a parka squirrel and endeavoring to dig it out, had delayed on the way. He bristled and step-

ped aside for McNair to pass, then loitered on up the country.

McNair covered the intervening distance on the run, but when he descended the final slope to the river he slackened his pace and moved slowly from the last fringe of trees. It had been his intention to ease the shoulder-straps of the pack wearily and lower it to the ground, then pounce upon the rifle, to wrest it from her in case she held it. Then he could shoot some of the dogs and club off the rest. He was aware of her cold hostility. She was perfectly capable of presenting the rifle at his head and holding him under its muzzle until Harrington's return; or killing him if Harrington failed to return.

He stepped from the timber and found the stage set in far more favorable fashion than he had hoped. The girl sat in the prow of the canoe. The rifle reposed near the stern. With lightning shift of plan to accommodate his actions to this unexpected break in his favor, he stepped to the stern of the canoe without even divesting himself of his pack, shoved off and settled himself into place.

"He said for me to go on ahead with you in this craft and he'd follow in mine," he explained casually.

He slipped the shoulder straps of his pack and eased it off, balancing it behind him in the canoe. Then he picked up the paddle and headed the canoe out into midstream, casting an eye upon the dogs along the shore. They were utterly harmless to him now. Depositing the paddle, he picked up the rifle.

From far up-country, rising above the sound of the stream, there came the long-drawn howl of a husky. McNair could not see the sudden anguish leap into the eyes of the girl. Unmoved, he trained the rifle upon the back of her head, balancing himself to be ready to right the canoe against the lurch of an inert body toward either side, and without a word of warning pressed the trigger.

The dull lifeless click of a hammer that falls on an empty chamber when one is set for an explosion is invariably disconcerting, even when the intent is no more than to fire at a target. But such was this man's iron composure that he instantly worked the lever of the weapon to throw a cartridge into the barrel, divining that Harrington, in common with many who follow the trails, probably carried his gun with magazine full but with no shell in the barrel when portaging or when not expecting to bring the weapon into immediate play.

"I knew it, you fiend!" the girl hissed. "If you've killed him I'll hunt you down with my dogs!"

With a violent sidewise wrench she upset the canoe, spilling both its occupants and its contents into the stream. McNair retained both his presence of mind and his grip on the rifle. Tilting the weapon to permit the water to drain from the barrel, he presented the muzzle at the girl's head and pressed the trigger again.

"It's empty, you devil!" she raged. Her eyes seemed to dart green lightning into his own, as she

lifted her voice in a high clear call. He saw the dogs swarming into the water. Lifting the rifle, he struck viciously at the head before him, but it disappeared beneath the surface. Instead he felt a searing pain in his shoulder and his grip on the rifle relaxed. It slipped from his fingers and sank. He knew that the girl, diving deep, had snatched the heavy knife from her belt and plunged it into his shoulder. The next thrust might disembowel him or reach his heart. The dogs were swimming toward him. Under these circumstances, he would be under a disadvantage in grappling with one, to say nothing of a score of them.

He knew that he had to deal with an antagonist who was as much at home in the water as an otter. With another day coming, he was not the man to face such overwhelming odds.

With a few swift strokes he reached the overturned canoe, righted it, and holding one side with the hand of his injured arm, he endeavored with his other to propel both it and himself to the far shore.

The girl, gauging the distance to the rapids below, headed inshore with long easy strokes, calling her dogs to follow. As she emerged, dripping, the long-drawn howl of a husky sounded again from up-country. She started toward the sound at a run, with but one backward glance as McNair and the canoe were swept over the first dip of the rapids together.

CHAPTER VI

HARRINGTON gulped the hot tea and sampled a few bites of warm bread flavored with a gravy that he knew for the drippings of broiled moose meat. Several times during the past three days he had tasted these same things, but this was the first time that he had felt sufficiently at ease mentally and physically to experience curiosity concerning the phenomena.

It was a sadly battered body that a tangle of alder growth had halted on its downward journey to the brink of the canyon, a faint spark of life that Lynne had nursed back from the brink of eternity.

The moose meat was understandable. Lynne had probably killed a yearling moose near camp. But flour, rice, tea? All of their food had gone to the bottom when the overturned canoe spilled its contents into the river, an event which Lynne had related to him. He now voiced a weak query.

"It was his food," she explained. "He had cached it and I found it—a great deal of food. Evidently he had come prepared to make a long stay."

This recitation served to recall to Harrington's mind the man McNair, and to send a feeble current

of rage pulsing through his battered frame at the mental picture of the man pointing a rifle at the back of a defenseless girl and pressing the trigger without warning.

"But I always carried my rifle loaded," he found strength to say under the reviving influence of the food.

"And I had unloaded it," Lynne explained. "So long as you didn't intend to use it on him, it was useless to you and fitted in with his purpose. I felt that he would try to seize it and shoot us both down at the first opportunity."

"Then why did you let him take it at all?" Harrington asked.

"I arranged it that way when you left. If the two of you returned together, all right. If he should come hurrying back ahead of you, his first move would be to seize the gun at all hazards, for without it he would be helpless. I did it to give him a chance to show you that he intended to murder us. Otherwise you would not have believed it."

"Smart girl, Lynne," he praised. "Do you think he was drowned going over the rapids?"

"No. They're not bad, and he probably made it through safely," she predicted.

"I'm glad he didn't drown. Some day we'll meet again, and I'm looking forward to the pleasure of cracking his neck."

Lynne pondered this.

"I hated the thought of doing it myself but when

he came back it seemed necessary, so I nerved myself to do an unpleasant thing," she said slowly. "Then you despised me for doing something from necessity that you would do with pleasure. I saw it in your eyes."

"Never that," he protested. "It only shocked me for a moment. It's only that men don't expect women to go in for such things. And that's why you let him escape that day in the river?"

"Yes. I didn't want to do anything you wouldn't like," she replied.

"I still can't make any sense out of the whole matter. There doesn't seem to be any good reason—no motive for it." Harrington said. "It seems incredible, some way."

Three cracked ribs, a broken collarbone, a badly gashed skull and sundry other contusions about the anatomy cannot be disregarded by even the most perfect physical structure, and Harrington spent much time in uneasy pain-wracked slumber during the next few days. As he convalesced, his thoughts revolved in an eternal round of speculation as to what could have actuated McNair. His purpose had not been to gain possession of the girl, for he had meant to kill her also. Robbery could scarcely account for it, as he had calmly booted almost half of their combined outfits over the shelf along with Harrington. His grub cache revealed the fact that he was well supplied. He had deliberately planned it—but why? It all seemed rather senseless, since

he could not formulate so much as a plausible theory to account for the reason behind it. Here again was revealed the essential difference between the respective workings of his mind and Lynne's. Harrington, being acquainted with men's usual uniformity of conduct under given conditions, could scarcely credit the thing after the fact itself had been established, because he could not fathom the motive. Lynne, with practically no first-hand knowledge of men, had divined the fact in advance, and even now was unconcerned over the motive. Harrington speculated afresh upon Lynne's odd faculty of divination. Did it spring from physical sources or from that elusive quality variously defined as instinct, intuition or sixth sense? Animals have it. A dog divines things about a man instantly—not whether he would be rated a good or bad character according to moral precepts, for such characterizations have been erected artificially by man, but the present reactions of his real motive. That can be accounted for on physical grounds. Man's physical system reacts instantly when his mind distills either anger or fear so that he is ready either to fight or to run, as occasion demands. And this drastic physical change is instantly apparent to the keen nose of a dog. Also a dog's ears, attuned to catch delicate shadings of sound, unerringly detect in the voice of a human those hidden vibrations of hate or fear that are concealed by plausible expression from his fellow men.

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Lynne, too, might have reacted to similar messages received over the paths of the physical senses, her ears detecting in the secret vibration of McNair's tones his sinister intent. She had mentioned his voice. Or had her warning emanated from some even more subtle and less easily understandable source? Was it allied to the mysterious workings of the Moccasin Telegraph of primitive peoples, to that odd faculty that enables a dog or horse to escort his master to human habitation when, for all of his reasoning intelligence, he is hopelessly befuddled and lost? Whatever the source of her knowledge, she had reacted unerringly to her intuitions, while Harrington, relying upon sound, reasoning intelligence, had failed to divine the truth. It was uncanny, he thought. He must study the thing out when he was stronger.

Now that Harrington was convalescing, Lynne reverted to her original pastime of urging him to tell her of the outside world, settling herself with fairly purring contentment when he acceded to her requests. On the sixth day Harrington declared that he would be able to travel on the next. Lynne shook her head. Another three or four days, she decided.

"You've always told me about men, never about women," she said. "Tell me about women you have known."

All Harrington's thoughts of women had revolved round but one woman for the past two years. They

reverted to her now; and Lynne sensed the subtle change in him, a lessening of the quizzical good nature with which he had been reciting things for her entertainment. For a space he was silent.

“Well, once upon a time there was a beautiful lady,” he began, with the formula which all ages have sanctioned as the proper manner in which to usher in a fairy tale, a form of introduction to which he frequently resorted in response to Lynne’s requests that he talk to her. “Beautiful and very wealthy. Her fortune ranked among the first twenty in the world. She had town houses and country places scattered broadcast about the face of the earth in every fashionable resort, and floating palaces to convey herself and her retinue of servants from one to another. Many men sought her but the lady had a great fear. Although a world-famed beauty, and knowing that she deserved to be loved for herself alone, she suspected that many of these men loved her money more than they loved herself. She would never give herself into the keeping of any man except one with a love so great that she herself meant everything, her money nothing. That was her reputation—what every one believed of her.

“Then along came the Blundering Fool and offered her just that before he knew who she was. He met her first in a bit of enchanted woodland, which he later discovered was the back yard, so to speak, of one of her numerous estates. He saw in

her only a beautiful maid with tastes so simple that she sought her pleasures in the wood. He returned again the next day and for many days, and always found her waiting at the appointed hour. Now the Blundering Fool, in his own estimation and in that of his fellows, was something of a success, having achieved an enviable place near the top of his profession. It pleased him because it would enable him to do things for this woman. He could take her on far journeys and show her the wonders of the world which she would never be able to see otherwise. Then the simple maid revealed her true identity and the Blundering Fool was actually disappointed. The things he had planned to do for her were things which she had done for herself for so long a time that the thought of them wearied her. But he persisted. She began to see less of him, to fail to meet him and he would stride about the wood, hurt and angry. She went back to her accustomed walks of life, and the man, having many friends therein, followed her. One day, when they quarreled, she pointed out that his material achievements were pitifully small as compared to the standards of the world in which she moved. She explained it in kindly fashion, even gently. Great wealth was a force, and it imposed certain duties upon its custodian. Chief among these was the duty to preserve it intact, and to add to it, since wealth, once scattered, was a great force dissipated. Wealth must seek wealth. The man departed. If she

thought so little of his achievements then it was certain that she would not care to see him again. His love, his own self-respect, had been assailed, his pride stabbed to the quick. He departed without further leave-taking and did not send back word of his whereabouts. So that ends the story of the Blundering Fool and the Beautiful Rich Girl. They never saw each other again."

Harrington was plunged into abstraction and so failed to notice Lynne's reaction to his recitation. Her customary eager comments and requests for more details were not forthcoming. Her silence matched his own and her eyes were averted.

"It was the woman who was the fool," she presently announced. Perhaps it was inherent in her to understand the foibles of her sex, even though she had not experienced them from personal association, an instinctive knowledge of the capricious cruelty which so many of her sisters feel it imperative to inflict upon the objects of their love, for she added, "Besides, she didn't mean it. She thought he would keep coming back."

She rose swiftly, her gaze still averted.

"I'll take my plunge now," she said, and headed for the river. Never a day passed but she bathed from one to three times. In lake or stream, warm pool or cold, she sought the water with the same relish that a beaver exhibits when returning to its native element. But this plunge brought no

joy to her. She swam downstream and emerged to sit on a rock in the sun.

Never before had she experienced the same sickness that fastened upon her spirit now, as if a cold heavy weight had come to anchor deep within her. In all of her capable young life she had faced every contingency with fortitude and resourcefulness. Now she faced something which she knew not how to combat. How was one to come to grips with an intangible enemy? She did not even question but that the girl of the story was her mortal foe. Unerringly she knew it.

Lynne had selected her mate with the instinctive simplicity of a wild thing, her love winging its way to offer itself into the keeping of Harrington as a bird wings its bright-plumaged course to prostrate its quivering loveliness before the mate of its choice. She would have fought to retain him for herself with the same single-hearted savagery of purpose exhibited by a wild creature during the mating moon of its tribe. But here was something which could not be fought yet must be faced—an intangible foe capable of inflicting abject misery upon her at a distance.

She herself had looked forward in sheer ecstasy to the prospect of journeys to far places with Harrington while he showed her the wonder spots of the world that otherwise she would never see. Day by day as he convalesced, her thoughts had danced ahead on winged feet of joyous anticipation against

the day when she would emerge with him into that actual world of people that to her was fairyland. Now the joy had gone out of the prospect. Her entire being recoiled from it. Their coming entrance into that world of human kind held forth but one picture, and that one appalling, the immediate meeting between Harrington and that girl of the story. She visualized herself deprived of that companionship which had come to mean all of life to her. With a sudden savage intensity she decided that she must keep Harrington here and prevent that meeting at all hazards.

For one flashing instant, in keeping with her usual forthrightness of method, she was tempted to dart back to camp and confront him with a request that he stay on here with her. But from some dim recess of her being a tiny voice dissuaded her from this course. Perhaps her next thought was born as a heritage that had been handed down to her through ten thousand generations of female ancestors who had been forced to gain their ends by the circuitous paths of subtlety and guile, since the brute strength to enforce their wishes had been denied to them. Theirs not the privilege to rule by forthright command, but theirs the hands, nevertheless, that actually ruled by circumvention and adroit indirection.

Lynne, harking back to this ancient heritage of her sisterhood in this, her first extremity, cast about for some subterfuge. But the candid Lynne was

not versed in guile, totally unacquainted with the provocative seductiveness of her more sophisticated sisters, unaware even of the compelling power of her own sheer young loveliness. She was aware only that she felt a divine yearning for this man, the desire to have him with her always as her very own, and a savage loathing for that other woman who would take him from her. She found herself unable to formulate any adequate plan by which to achieve her new determination to remain here and to keep Harrington with her. She did not return to camp until late.

On the following day she sat before him while she grained the hair from the hide of the yearling moose and prepared to fashion it into rawhide pack panniers for the dogs, since Harrington's collar bone would not permit him to pack a load for some time. Harrington admired her deftness at this work and his gaze strayed to the various utensils that she had so cunningly fashioned from birch bark. He had watched her pull up a long willowy root of a spruce, peel the bark from it, start a slit at the top and with her strong white teeth work the section of pliable wood away from the parent root, fashioning it into a heavy cord as she progressed. Then she had cut quarter-inch slabs of birch bark to suit her needs and while both bark and spruce-root cords were still green and pliable, she had punctured the overlapping edges of the bark at frequent intervals with the point of a bone awl, inserting the cord

and drawing it firmly home, first having cemented the overlapping seams with spruce gum to render them water-tight. A half-dozen finished rogans of artistic design testified to her skill. He had watched her cook in these utensils by the native expedient of dropping a series of hard hot stones into the broth and extracting the cooled ones dexterously to be replaced by others until the cooking process was completed; mix her dough in a birch-bark pan, place a lump of it on the end of a green stick and cook her bread by turning it over the coals; cook moose steaks on a wickerwork broiler of green sticks; cover a whole grouse with clay, bury it in a bed of slow coals and roast the bird to a turn. He marvelled at her astounding facility along these lines, her thoroughgoing capability to exist in relative comfort in circumstances under which the most resourceful of ordinary beings reared in civilization would find themselves unable to survive. It occurred to Harrington that Lynne had been unusually silent and that she had failed to voice a single one of her usual eager requests to be told more details of some phase of the life toward which they would soon be traveling.

"What's the matter Lynne?" he asked. "Has the delay in getting started to the outside disappointed you?"

"No. I don't want to go there at all," she returned. "I would rather stay here with you."

This sudden reversal of attitude was not at all

surprising, Harrington reflected. On the contrary it was highly natural. Nature has implanted in all living creatures the love of home and the urge to return to it. The straying mare will return to the range where her first colt was foaled; the salmon swims thousands of miles from the mysterious depths of the sea to spawn and die in the very stream which gave him birth; and the bird flies thousands of miles through the skies to return to the old nesting place. Even men, and among them those who wander the farthest and remain away the longest are the ones who cling most fondly to memories of home. Lynne was getting a touch of it in advance. But would it last? Might not the interest of the new life cause her to realize the deprivation of the old until she would even come to hate the thought of it instead of experiencing a yearning to return?

"It will be a long tedious pull to make it down to some native camp on the Liard on foot," he said. "Right now, it's a case of my kingdom for a boat. We could raft it, of course, but there's many a stretch of rough water that a raft couldn't live through—where we couldn't even line it down. We'd have to make a new raft below every such stretch, which will be something of a chore without an ax and only our knives to work with."

Lynne looked up quickly. He had put an unexpected weapon into her hands. It had been her intention to pack the dogs and travel on foot for perhaps thirty miles to a stand of birch that would

afford bark of sufficient dimensions and then to construct a sizable craft. But she did not mention the fact that she could fashion a canoe with the facility of a native. Neither did she remark upon the fact that she had a half dozen small canoes cached on the courses of many streams within a day's travel. Instead she averted her eyes and said:

"It will be almost impossible to make it through that country on foot. It would take us months of wandering round. There are huge marshes, and there are waist-deep muskeg flats fifty miles across and running right down to the river." This from Lynne, who could travel anywhere in this region with as little concern as the average man feels in taking an afternoon stroll in his own neighborhood.

Harrington nodded. He had been thinking of those tremendous muskeg flats that he had passed in coming up the river. The mosquitoes would soon be out in full force—gnats, black flies, bulldogs, no-see-'em, all the insect pests of the North. In addition to the extreme difficulty of travel, the flies would make it almost unendurable in those muskeg flats, and they did not even have bed-nets to shelter them while sleeping. Lynne had recognized this, also the long delay required by a journey on foot. No wonder she was disappointed, after her recent eager anticipation, he thought.

"It will be tough going. No doubt of that," he said. "And it will be a long hard pull—two months likely, at the very least before we could make the

Liard. Summer travel in this north country, except by canoe, is a stiff proposition. We could make it, of course. We could travel anywhere, by keeping at it, but it won't be too easy."

"Then why don't we stay here until the freeze-up this fall and go out behind the dogs after snowfall?" she suggested. "I have a wonderful sleigh; and we could make another if necessary, and then ride out flying. Suppose we do that."

She waited breathlessly for an answer. It was long in coming. Harrington was staring off into space. That would be a disappointment to Lynne, after her present touch of homesickness should wear off. For himself it did not matter. Villiers has been right. Nature knew her business, none better, in choice of anesthetics; time and the wilderness. For two years he had been obsessed with the idea that he must revisit old scenes in order to find surcease from heartache. Only rebellious pride had restrained him. Now, curiously enough, since he had found a measure of peace in the wilderness, he had a presentiment that he would find a renewal of heartache waiting him on the threshold, in case he did revisit past scenes. That feeling had been growing upon him daily since his return to civilization had been definitely planned. His thoughts trailed off into speculations concerning relative measures of contentment. Was there any mortal in civilized society in whose face one could not detect some sign of stress? All bore the marks of living at high

tension in their efforts to maintain the pace. All were harassed by some secret dread—fear of failure, apprehension lest those behind them should draw even and pass them, fear that those ahead should acquire a still greater lead, dread of earning the disapproval of organized society by transgressing one or another of its conventions. And even those bold, aggressive individuals, seemingly impervious to the stings of such minor apprehensions—what of them? Was there any man, no matter what his occupation or his station in life, who did not collect still greater responsibilities which he could not lay down, who did not strain toward some goal of still greater achievement? No, it was all a mad race with a starter's gun at birth and no finish line save death, a madly revolving treadmill with no place to get off. There was much toward which to strive; material progress in the attainment of wealth and power, greater social, political or religious prestige; there was necessity in it and greed, lofty purpose and high ambition, but of contentment and surcease from strain there was none. The civilized machine was geared too high for that. A highly religious state of mind was supposed to be the one way in which to find true contentment and serenity of spirit. But was it to be attained even then? It seemed to Harrington that even those who had attained to that high plane were tortured by a vast unrest at their lack of success in elevating all mankind to their own rarefied levels. Perhaps, Harrington mused,

the vast tranquility that descends upon the spirit of man in a virgin wilderness is a throwback to the primitive, the urge in every man to return to the simple, away from which he is ever propelled toward greater complexity by the civilized machine; to leap from the spinning wheel into space and be one in himself instead of a mere part of the pattern; the desire to break from conformity to mold and for once in life do as he damn well pleased. Why shouldn't he linger here a little longer? What did a few months more or less matter in the end?

These abstractions were rudely shattered. Lynne, waiting for an answer, could stand the suspense no longer.

"Oh, please!" she coaxed. "Please, Clay, stay here with me."

"That's just exactly what I was planning that we would do," Harrington said. "If you won't mind the delay too much, Lynne, we'll stay on up here in your home country until snowfall."

CHAPTER VII

LYNNE was adjusting pack equipment on a half-dozen dogs, each outfit consisting of two birch-bark panniers some eighteen inches long, half that thickness and a foot in depth, their tops attached to a strip of buckskin that rested across the dog's back, the bottom similarly secured by two broad straps of the same material that passed beneath the animal. Rawhide lashropes completed the equipment.

"And just what adventuring does all this preparation presage?" Harrington inquired lazily. "Invasion of new territory on a foraging expedition?"

"A visit to my poultry yard to gather the eggs," Lynne informed.

For a week Harrington had been recuperating in Lynne's home retreat, the sink hole basin on the floor of which he had discovered her that first day. Not a bad retreat, he thought, for one who wished to spend his life in seclusion. Even though Lynne had led him to the floor of the basin he doubted if he could find his way into it unassisted. A possible observer from the rims above would be unable to distinguish the smoke from the scores of vaporous columns rising from various steam vents.

Lynne finished equipping the dogs.

"Feel equal to joining me?" she asked.

"Think I will," Harrington agreed.

They mounted to the great tundra-clad upland plain.

"It's a little late for fresh eggs," Lynne said.

"They begin nesting by the time the ice goes out in the spring and some of them will be hatching by now. But there are always some whose nests have been broken up by foxes, ravens or the elements and they will be starting all over again."

Untold millions of wild fowl resorted to these regions. The open country was dotted by shallow lakes and marshy expanses. Gulls wheeled about the nesting islands that graced the larger bodies of water. Grebes nested in the rushes of the marshland. An occasional pair of stately white swans floated near some tiny islet covered with stunted brush. Loons, too, resorted to these brushy islets to nest. Shore birds—golden and black-bellied plovers, yellowlegs, sandpipers and curlews—nested both on the islands and the mainland. The swarming millions of ducks of a dozen varieties and also the geese, great gray Canadas and their smaller relatives, the Hutchins and the cacklers, nested back in the heavy tundra. Sand-hill cranes stalked about with majestic dignity. All added their voices to the clamor with which the feathered hosts protested the advance of the intruders into their domain.

It was for the eggs of ducks that the hunt was

chiefly staged. A hen mallard, concealed in the deep tundra, remained gamely on her eggs until literally nosed out by a dog, then rose with protesting squawks and fluttered in apparent helplessness to lure the marauder away from the nest. This ruse resulted in canine pursuit, also in canine failure, for the bird always kept just out of reach and finally took wing.

Lynne and Harrington proceeded straight to the spot to locate the nest as the dog bounced off in pursuit of the fleeing cripple.

"Hope springs eternal in the canine breast," Harrington laughed. "After some thousands of such occurrences a dog still remains convinced that the next duck is actually at his mercy. That is because a dog is a straight-thinking sort of critter. Not so with cats. A cat animal matches craft with craft, uses stealth and treachery even when it is unnecessary. That's the chief fundamental difference between canine and feline psychology."

The nest contained twelve eggs. Lynne shook her head.

"Full clutch. They'll be too high."

They left it unmolested and sought another. Where but a few eggs were found in a nest they were appropriated on the theory that they were new-laid, while the nests containing full complements of from ten to fourteen eggs were left undisturbed. They discovered the nests of shorebirds—plovers, sandpipers and curlews, but did not molest them.

Twoscore nests of geese, each containing from five to eight great eggs, also came under their observation, but were likewise left intact, Lynne pronouncing goose eggs too highly flavored to be appetizing. After a hunt of several hours' duration, they had collected some twenty dozens of fresh eggs, stowed them in the panniers, packed firmly in moss, and headed homeward. Harrington almost stepped upon a Canada goose before she left her eggs.

"Queer about the varying nesting habits of the same birds in different localities," he said. "Here the big gray fellows nest in the tundra. In the Yukon flats they nest on bars in the river, while along the coast and in the islands of Southeastern Alaska they feed on the tide flats but wing their way well up on the slopes of the mountains and nest in heavy timber. In Wyoming I've found their nests in willow swamps and on deserted muskrat houses. One year in the foothill country of Montana, in the cottonwood timber along creek beds, I saw several Canadas that had become tree-nesting birds by laying their eggs in the deserted nests of hawks and herons."

"Farther south in the timber there's a duck, the bufflehead, that nests in holes in trees, the same as the woodpeckers," Lynne said. "I've watched them struggle to squeeze into a hole that seemed much too small for them. While the young are still fuzzy little tots, the mother pushes them out of the hole and they fall to the ground with a thump. I've

watched that operation a half dozen times without witnessing a casualty. The little fellows sprawl there till they recover their breath and follow the old duck to the water. Maybe generations of that sort of tumbling has endowed bufflehead ducklings with a rubber anatomy."

They discussed various phases of bird's nesting habits as they retraced their homeward way through the rookeries. A network of deep gorges fringed the edge of the plain, dropping away toward the mighty slash of the main canyon below the falls. Lynne dipped into a break in the head of one and they followed along its steeply pitching floor, turning off into one after another branching defiles that were mere slits in the rocks, penetrating a veritable maze of feathering rents in the earth's crust. At last they emerged from such a crease and stood on a shelf on the walls of the main gorge. This ledge led slantingly down to the water's edge where two small birch-bark canoes reposed.

A half-mile above them were the falls. The river poured over a lofty parapet and fell sheer for a thousand feet. The force generated by this terrific plunge expelled the air away from the face of the falls and hurled it down the narrow course of the canyon in furious compression. The stupendous battering of that body of water at the termination of its thousand-foot plunge shook the foundations of the earth and the roar of its baffled energy leaped skyward, only to come into conflict with that out-

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bound torrent of air which formed an invisible canopy that caused the rising volume of thunder to recoil upon itself. It was lashed into the narrow rock-walled mouths of side canyons, each with its varying acoustics that produced a different tone. In effect, it was a colossal organ with a thousand pipes. It was not surprising, Harrington thought, that at a distance he had fancifully imagined himself listening to harmonious chords rendered by some titanic orchestra. This was the only point from which the falls could be viewed. The way to it from above was cut off by a series of minor waterfalls and by deep intersesting box canyons on either hand. The river below was blocked to passage by a half-mile of tumbling cascades between sheer cliffs.

From the caldron at the foot of the big falls to the head of these lower cascades, the canyon was floored by a smooth stretch of water with but a mild current. Stripping the pack equipment from the dogs and loading it into the canoes, they put off upstream for some two hundred yards to land at the foot of another sloping shelf. The dogs took to the water and swam. After shaking the water from their coats they were reloaded and the procession filed up the shelf to the mouth of another crevice, similar to the one from which they had just emerged on the descent. This led up through a narrow defile that eventually opened out into the bottoms of the sink hole into which Harrington had

peered that first day to discover Lynne and her dogs on its floor.

They deposited their fresh eggs in a cavern that was cooled by an icy spring. The meat of moose and caribou also hung in this refrigerated spot, where it would keep for months. A moose-hide teepee stood at the base of one of the huge rocks with which the bottoms were dotted. Each of the protruding teepee poles had been left decorated with its natural tuft of spruce needles at the tip. Sprays of spruce adorned its conical walls at intervals, not in any great profusion, but in sufficient quantity to break the outline, so that it would defy detection from above. Harrington, on the day that he had discovered Lynne, had searched these bottoms minutely with powerful binoculars yet had failed to discern the teepee in this disguise.

Harrington examined the rich black soil.

"We could raise a wonderful garden here," he said. "Everything, likely, that would grow in Colorado or Wyoming at elevations of five thousand feet. Potatoes, peas, carrots, turnips, radishes, lettuce, onions—even cucumbers and tomatoes would ripen here. We could even grow wheat, except that perhaps one year out of four an early frost would strike it while still in the milk. On the Alaskan side I've seen wonderful gardens within a few miles of the Arctic Circle. But not one out of ten people of the outside world would believe it possible."

"We had a big garden always," Lynne said. "But

the snowslide that buried the house deprived me of all vegetables and seeds so that I couldn't replant."

"I'd wondered why you hadn't raised things here," Harrington returned. "But I didn't see any sign of a plot that had been laid out for a garden, even in years past, when I was scanning these bottoms from the rims that first day."

"We put it out in irregular patches," she explained. "Then if any one should come out on the rims and look down, if he noticed the disturbed places at all he would attribute them to the operations of a bear that had been excavating for roots or rodents."

"I see," Harrington murmured. The vanished Pan had been a very cautious person in other matters beside his assumed name, he reflected. Had he been fugitive or recluse, to take such pains to insure against intrusion and discovery? In any event, he had been a remarkable character, a man of wide knowledge and intelligence, as evidenced by the mental accomplishments of this girl whom he had instructed since infancy—the girl who, even now, did not know who she was or who her foster parent had been. But instead of commenting upon this matter, since mention of the departed one brought a measure of sorrow to Lynne, Harrington confined his remarks to the matter in hand—that of agricultural possibilities in the North.

"The reason that the outside world has given little thought to the problem of agriculture in the

north is because so few realize the intensity of the Northern summer. The growing season here is short, perhaps a little more than three months, but during that period the days are so long that there is an average of eighteen hours of sunshine daily, only an hour of darkness and perhaps twice that period of twilight. The night is so short that the earth doesn't have time to cool off after eighteen hours of heating by sunshine, so we have twenty-four hours of growing weather every day—a shorter growing season but much more intense while it lasts. A hundred years from now, Lynne, and they'll be farming this present waste clear to the Arctic Circle."

The personal effects that Lynne had stored in a rock-walled cache before joining Harrington for their intended trip outside consisted chiefly of home-made articles that she had accumulated since the snowslide had buried the cabin that had been home to her; furs, some of them fashioned into sleeping robes and garments for winter wear; rawhide and caribou skins with the hair grained off and tanned into soft buckskin, a score of receptacles of various shapes cunningly fashioned from birch bark. In lieu of printed material wherewith to indulge in her usual pastime of reading, Lynne had occupied her time and engaged her mind as Tanlika had been wont to do, by practicing native crafts. However, there was a fair assortment of implements that had been in use at other points in the basin when the avalanche

had descended to crush the house and all that was in it. There were two axes, a crosscut saw, a draw-shave, a brace with a set of bits, a roll of light snare wire, two battered frying pans, a big iron pot and a few other items.

Harrington, also deprived of reading matter, began to cast about for some other means of outlet for his mental energies. Quite naturally his thoughts turned to channels in which his special talents had been developed through the practice of his profession. He investigated the boiling springs, the steam vents, from some of which issued blasts of air so intensely hot as to be devoid of moisture, and he pictured the harnessing of these agencies. When he found a few scattered sheets of mica and made inquiries of Lynne as to the whereabouts of the parent body, she led him to a spot where there were exposed outcroppings.

"That's a wonderful vein," he said, estimating it. "A few generations hence, when transportation makes it available, it will be very valuable. It's the best mica I've ever seen. But right now the chief value rests on how it can be utilized here. I can pry off flawless sheets a quarter of an inch thick and four feet square."

"Yes, the windows in our house were made of it," Lynne said.

"A man could make almost any kind of thing for human comfort here," Harrington said reflectively. "He could steam-heat his cabin, keep the

frost from a vegetable storehouse when it was a hundred below outside—any number of things. With this mica we could fashion a hothouse and get seeds started a couple of months before a garden could be seeded outside. There'd be increasing daily periods of sun for weeks before there was growing weather, and we could get the jump on the frost king that way and add a full month to the growing season with a steam-heated hothouse. Likely we could grow vegetables that wouldn't ripen otherwise."

Lynne listened and nodded assent from time to time. There seemed to be a certain eagerness in her very silence, and indeed there was, for the tones of his voice played through her being and roused a strange and sweet intoxication such as one experiences when listening to divine strains of music and giving way to them in abandon of mind and body. Harrington, looking upon her rapt face, was again impressed by that illusive quality of her beauty, as if some inner spirit of loveliness glowed through to illumine the flesh. A shining creature.

She had thrown herself down at full length before the teepee, the soft contours of her perfect young body showing through the clinging buckskin garments, and the man was acutely conscious of her vital and alluring femininity. He mentally likened her to an orchid of delicate loveliness yet with a haunting suggestion of the tropical, the exotic. With the power to attract men as the orchid draws

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the nectar-seeking moth, she was supremely unconscious of it. Utterly unspoiled and absolutely unawakened, he thought. And she was too completely in his care, too unselfconscious of sex, for him to permit any possible word or act of his to waken that consciousness within her. And of late, as he became increasingly aware of her allurements, he had suppressed the quickening in his blood at her nearness; and in manner of speech he had adopted an interested casualness.

Lynne, seeing that he had lapsed into abstraction, rose and moved off to a near-by pool for her plunge. Harrington indolently reviewed his present mode of life. Not a bad sort of existence. Here a man might be master of his own destiny, self-appointed emperor of a vast domain, subject to no petty restrictions and taboos save those of his own devising. But would a man, under continuance of such conditions of life, disintegrate and go downhill? Would he unconsciously be undergoing a reversion to the primitive? Lazily, Harrington diagnosed his mental attitude. Was it just the sheer lassitude of dead ambitions that led him to contemplate the advantages of that sort of life? Rather, he decided, a temporary mental lethargy induced by the opiate of perfect contentment upon which he was loath to intrude lest it should vanish.

Lynne rose from the pool and stood on its rocky shores a hundred yards away, the pink-and-white loveliness of her body outlined against the dark

background of the spruce. Harrington caught his breath at the sheer beauty of the picture. She was not immodest. Rather she had not been taught, and therefore the thought had not occurred to her that there was anything of shame in her perfect young body. She was as unselfconscious as the splendid bronze natives Harrington had known in certain islands of the Pacific, those that lived in the back country where the prudery of the white race had not yet penetrated to force them into shapeless "Mother Hubbards"—as unselfconscious as a trim-bodied thoroughbred colt, careening about in the blue grass.

Clothing, Harrington mused, had not been adopted originally to conceal the beauty of the human form but rather for the purpose of enhancing its attractiveness. The whole history of the rise of man was a history of art, the striving toward the beautiful in search of symbols that would set man apart from beasts. In architecture he had advanced from thatched hut to marble palaces in which to house himself, from the torture post and rude slab altars in the forest to marvellous cathedrals in which to worship his various gods; in music from the skin rattle and the tom-tom to the symphony orchestra; in painting and sculpturing from the scrawled figures and crude clay modelings of the cave men to the finished canvases and chaste white marble figures of the moderns; in literature from

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crudely carved inscriptions on tablets of stone to the printing press. And so on through every phase of human activity. Clothing, too, aside from its adoption for purposes of utility to protect the body from the elements, had been conceived as an art that would enhance, rather than detract from, the beauty of the human form. Wisely, too, he decided. Perhaps one woman in a hundred had a figure that was even passable. Any style of covering from a draped leopard skin or fibrous mat to the loveliest of modern fabrics, was an improvement that would mercifully conceal the defects of the other ninety-nine.

The great preponderance of unattractive females, discovering that by artful costuming they could largely neutralize the handicaps bestowed upon them by nature, had made drapery of the human form first a pleasure of concealment, then a fashion, then a decree that could not be violated. Originally, then, clothing had been adopted to conceal the defects of the human body and to render it more attractive. More modern peoples, having lost the initial reason in obscurity, had entirely reversed the meaning of it all, believing that clothing first had been devised to conceal the beauty of the human form and render it less attractive. Bah! It had originated in art to conceal ugliness and had become distorted into a moral obligation. Perhaps one in every thousand women had a perfect body; and that one was the loveliest work that Nature or the art of man had yet

been able to create. The ancients had recognized this and had endeavored to perpetuate the bodies of their loveliest women in marble. Lynne, he thought, was one in a million. The perfect lines of her body should be preserved in white marble. If only his engineer's hands could follow the dictates of his moody artist's soul and enable them to reproduce on canvas or in marble the picture that she made, outlined there above the pool, the world would be the richer for it.

Presently, resuming her soft buckskins, she returned to him and he recited some of his earlier reflections concerning the possibilities of the place.

"A man could be absolutely independent here. In addition to those other items—steam-heated cabin, vegetable storehouse and a mica-roofed hothouse, there's a dozen other improvements he could effect here. The country itself would support him. In season, there are tons of fruit for the picking, and other delicacies. The little lake at the lower end of the basin could be stocked with lake trout. Waterfowl would winter well on these warm pools, if a few shelters were built round their edges. Canada geese and mallard ducks are easily domesticated and we could catch hundreds of young ducks and geese. That would give us our own poultry. It wouldn't be much of a trick to catch a few caribou and domesticate them. The old-world reindeer is only a domesticated caribou, but not so fine as the American animal. Vegetables we could grow in abundance,

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and wheat. And with all this power here, it wouldn't be any great feat to construct a small mill to grind it. Every time one thing occurs to me it suggests possibilities for a dozen more."

He laughed and stretched his great frame.

"Of course, we'll be leaving here right after snow-fall, so we won't need any such contrivance, but it does seem rather a shame not to experiment a bit." He felt his shoulder with exploring fingers. "The old collar bone seems as good as new. To-morrow I think I'll start swinging an ax for exercise."

CHAPTER VIII

THE new cabin inspired Harrington with the same pride that he had felt formerly when viewing some completed project that stood as a monument to his engineering skill. There was one big room, graced by a great stone fireplace, and two smaller rooms opening into it. The windows were of quarter-inch sheets of mica. Flooring consisted of split poles smoothed with a drawshave, the pole roof covered with a heavy layer of moss and earth.

A dozen feet from the house a fissure in the rocks afforded outlet for a blast of air so hot as to be practically devoid of moisture. Harrington had fashioned a trench a foot in diameter, floored, walled and roofed with overlapping sheets of mica. This improvised pipe led from the steam vent to the foundation of the cabin. At its mouth, where it opened into the steam fissure, it was closed by a sheet of mica that worked in a rock slot fashioned to receive its edges. This operated after the fashion of a head-gate by which the flow of water is regulated at the intake of an irrigation ditch. By raising or lowering this crude intake valve, one could regulate the amount of heat that was diverted from the steam

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vent and forced beneath the wooden floors of the cabin.

Harrington viewed the results of his labor with enthusiasm.

"No trouble in defeating the Arctic frost king with that contrivance," he predicted. "The chief difficulty will be to refrain from turning on too much heat. I could turn a head of steam through there that would roast us to a turn if the weather stood at eighty below outside."

The cabin completed, Lynne and Harrington turned their energies toward furnishing it. A bunk was built in each of the two smaller rooms, then packed with a twelve-inch layer of moss, by far the best of all outdoor bedding material, and covered with buckskin. A couch of similar construction was fashioned for use in the living room. Several tables and cabinets were constructed of hewed planks; rustic chairs, the bottoms and backs of which Lynne upholstered with caribou hide and padded with moss or equipped with wickerwork effect achieved by weaving inch-wide strips of birch bark.

The northern summer proved itself a bountiful mistress and the whole countryside afforded an amazing variety and abundance of food for the taking. Strawberries were the first of the wild berries to ripen and the two occupants of the basin gathered great quantities of the luscious red fruit. Mushroom thrived on all sides and spring branches added their quota of delicacies by providing tender water-

cess. The timber was alive with grouse; the open tundra country swarmed with waterfowl. Thousands of young mallards and pintails, as yet unable to fly for any great distance, slid through the shallows, cleaving furrows in the tall marsh grasses that stood in the water. The geese had gone into the stage when they are known as flappers in the North, the young not yet sufficiently feathered out to fly, while the old birds, having entered the molt, were largely denuded of feathers and also unable to take the air. They progressed by running, aided by violent flapping of featherless wings, hence the name of flapper. Harrington eyed the young ducks and geese speculatively. It would be such a simple matter to catch a hundred or more of these creatures and domesticate them—to establish their own poultry yard in the sink hole.

On one occasion Lynne led Harrington far to the westward to a mountain upon the lower flanks of which were exposed veins of pure copper from which she had secured the materials for her arrowheads. This deposit, too, would have proven of tremendous value if within reach of transportation. As it stood, however, its only value for the present rested upon what use they could make of it in fashioning implements.


Returning, they passed along the shores of a lake. Lynne, signalling Harrington to be silent, slipped out on a rocky point. Shapes wavered vaguely in the water just off the ledge. Lynne, gauging the

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reflection of the rays, suddenly loosed an arrow, then motioned for Clay to join her. A big lake trout weighing perhaps twenty pounds floated there, pierced by the arrow. The clear waters of the lakes teemed with trout, and as the summer advanced Lynne and Harrington took quantities of these fish and transported them to the basin, there to split them and suspend them from racks to be dried in the sun and stored for winter dog feed.

In hunting for small game, Lynne used light arrows. Grouse and ptarmigans were abundant in the early fall and were not difficult to stalk. Lynne, drawing to within fifteen or twenty yards before loosing her arrow, seldom missed her prey. One day she shot seven grouse without a miss between.

Shortly thereafter they came out upon the rim of the sink hole and looked down into it. For some reason it had pleased Harrington to emulate the example of the Old Man of the North and to disguise the cabin so that it could not be detected readily. The roof was covered with a layer of moss and earth. Scattered irregularly on top of this covering were flat rocks. The protruding ends of the roof timbers were exceedingly irregular and to these long ends were lashed various bits of vegetation. Knowing exactly where the cabin stood, it was difficult nevertheless for Harrington to make it out, so closely did it blend with its surroundings. Any smoke that might issue from its chimney would seem to an observer on the rims merely the emanation of



vapor from another steam vent with which the floor of the place abounded.

And as he gazed down into it, he found himself speculating again as to how a man might spend his life here. He would be free from strain and worry, supplied with everything that was necessary to life and comfort. But wouldn't that very fact, the lack of further necessity to strive, cause a man to vegetate mentally? With what could he occupy his mind so that it would develop instead of sliding back? For a time, he knew, he could occupy his time and utilize his energy in developing the resources of the sink hole—harnessing that steam power that was going to waste; in experimenting with the agricultural possibilities; in starting their own flocks of poultry from the ducks, geese, ptarmigans and grouse with which the country abounded; in building up a herd of domesticated caribou; any number of things. With what had Pan occupied his mind? It was certain that he had not let down to any considerable extent, as evidenced by the broad knowledge that Lynne had acquired from him. All that had not come from a mind that was declining from lack of interest.

The old snowslide path down the timbered slope at the base of the cliffs showed as a lighter streak denuded of trees. At its foot a vast tangled pile of tree trunks and other débris marked the spot where the former cabin was buried deep beneath it.

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"What did the Old Man of the North do to keep his mind occupied?" he inquired of Lynne.

"He was a great naturalist, a worshipper of Nature as the all-powerful force that ruled the universe. He was always engaged in research work along natural history lines, also into human affairs, as he tried to decipher the source behind every belief that had originated throughout the ages. Then he would write and write for days on end. All his manuscripts are rotting there beneath a hundred feet of tree trunks, earth and rocks."

"Lost to the world," Harrington said regretfully.

If the Old Man of the North had been able to occupy his mind to advantage in such isolation, why could he not do the same, Harrington reflected. Pan, freed of the necessity of using his mental energies in the mere matter of wresting a livelihood from the world, had not availed himself of the opportunity afforded to permit his mind to degenerate from lack of use. Instead, he had made use of the leisure thus acquired to improve himself. Perhaps, if those vanished manuscripts had not been lost to the world, they might have furnished the germ for a new philosophy of life.

Leaves of willow, birch, aspen and alder turned crimson and yellow from the frost as the summer passed into autumn and the nights grew longer. Great banks of berry bushes on open side hills afforded a riot of color for as far as the eye could reach across the landscape. They also afforded tons

of blueberries, elderberries, red raspberries and others for the picking. Harrington wandered with Lynne through this land of plenty and found it good to be alive. They cooked quantities of berries and stored them in birch-bark rogans, the openings closed with inch-thick layers of melted caribou tallow poured while hot and which cooled into solid white plugs that effectively sealed out the air. In the matter of storing food and in the manufacture of articles designed for convenience, he seemed unmindful of the fact that the day approached when they must depart and leave all this behind; and Lynne never mentioned their impending departure.

As the days grew shorter and the nights longer, she fashioned candles. Her molds consisted of eight-inch sections of elderberry stalks, the pith removed save for a plug at the end, then split lengthwise. The wicks she made from the dried fibers of blossoms known in the North as cotton flowers, resembling the white heads of ripened dandelions except that their shape was flattened instead of globular. By twirling these fibers between thumb and forefinger, adding the short lengths as she progressed, she fashioned cords an eight of an inch in diameter.

With the knotted end of the cord held in the center of the pith plug the two halves of the mold were again fitted together and secured, then poured full of melted tallow. When this cooled, white and hard, the two halves of the mold were removed, leaving a candle an inch and a half in thickness.

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In a hundred ways she availed herself of the advantages that Nature had provided and fashioned them into conveniences to add to human comfort and efficiency. Harrington—himself with a widespread reputation as a man well versed in the secrets of the wilderness, one who could be left stranded in jungle, desert or ice field and survive—was aware of his own relative incompetence in such matters when compared to Lynne's fund of woodlore and her ability to turn it to human advantage.

Without his being conscious of it, Harrington's outlook on life had undergone a fundamental transition. That vast abstraction that had seemed to shut out even a glimmer of interest in his surroundings, the mental lethargy that had remained unshaken for so much as a second by the blandishments of the dance-hall girls of the Yukon camps, the shift of fortune at the poker tables or by nights of drinking raw liquor with roistering miners, had slipped away from him. For long he had been a man without an interest in life, given over to introspection and the feeling that there was no further incentive in life for him—an unhealthy state of mind. He had gone flat mentally, and had no desire to strive further along old lines. What was there toward which to strive? Added material resources, added recognition in his profession—would either profit him? No. Further advancement in either way would only bring added responsibilities that would simply bore him. Now, without realizing it, he had desisted from this

introspective habit and lack of interest in life. He had become actively interested in a number of things, all of them revolving round Lynne. Chief among these was her almost dual personality. This he attributed to her exclusive association with but two persons, each of them representing an extreme in human types. From Tanlika she had absorbed the crafts of the savage. The modern civilized individual is a specialist. Every day, in his every act of life, he utilizes a thousand articles that he considers absolutely indispensable to his welfare, accepting them as his due and taking them as a matter of course. He gives practically no thought to them. Yet, if suddenly deprived of them, he would be absolutely helpless to replace the least of them by his own unaided efforts. From the simplest utensil of his kitchen to the appliances of his office, he would find himself unable to reproduce a single item, having no knowledge of the ingredients or the process of manufacture that had gone into its fashioning. The things he used every day were the products of ten thousand varieties of producing specialists. The smartest and most resourceful civilized man, if suddenly deprived of the things that he accepts without question, would find himself confronting the necessity to fend for himself, to provide his own clothing, food, utensils and shelter by his own unaided efforts, and he would be but a sorry and incapable creature indeed, hard pressed merely to keep life in his body.

Lynne, on the contrary, possessed the faculty of the most primitive savages, that of knowing every act required to produce every article that was necessary to her existence. She could be left stranded in this Northern wilderness in the spring, weaponless and unclothed, yet she would survive. With no more than a clamshell or a stone with a cutting edge she would fashion spruce-root cord, weave it with other materials into a cable of sufficient strength to withstand the struggles of the heaviest creatures of the wild. With a noose spread from the brush flanking a game trail to snare the head of traveling moose or caribou she would provide herself with the essentials. The animal itself would furnish ingredients with which to tan the hide by means of the old Indian tan—equal parts of brains, liver and grease. She would make her own fire by friction; her own weapons. Step by step he pictured her activities. When autumn arrived she would be housed in a moose-hide tepee, clothed in warm fur, traveling on snowshoes of her own fashioning, supplied with meat, fish and berries in abundance, ready to weather in comfort the rigors of an Arctic winter.

That much she had absorbed from Tanlika, the Iklut woman. From her other companion she had absorbed probably much of the best that civilized thought has evolved. So it was not too difficult to understand the two extremes of her. With keen and questing brain she had simply absorbed all that these two extremes of human types—the primitive

savage and the brilliant product of civilized society—had been able to give her. The one extreme she knew by practical application, the other only as abstract knowledge, the application of which she knew only vicariously as yet.

With the first cold days of autumn Lynne and Harrington journeyed to the resort of the wild fowl on the marshes of the tundra-clad plains. With light arrows Lynne dropped many a fat mallard and Canada goose. These were packed on the dogs and transported back to be stored in the cave until such time as the freeze-up would preserve them for an indefinite period. In the course of a week they stored some two hundred ducks, geese and plovers.

All such activities afforded an outlet for Harrington's mental energies and provided an effectual foil for his former disinterest in life, and he seldom indulged in uncomfortable retrospection. Without being actively conscious of any change in his mental attitude, he found himself content with the present and looking into a future that seemed to promise inviting prospects.

Lynne found this association a source of supreme delight. Her very nearness to Harrington was ecstasy, their slightest contact stirring in her an exquisite tenderness, the dawning of passion. And as her delight in him obscured all other issues of life, she became more determined to devise some means of retaining him for herself alone. But since learning of that other woman, she had concealed her feeling

for Harrington, fearing that a premature disclosure might operate against her plans. Perhaps this reserve was not a lessening of her naturalness and the beginning of conventional artificiality but instead the expression of a very natural faculty inherited from generations of female ancestors who had practiced indirection to gain their ends. In the face of her natural impulsiveness it was sometimes difficult to keep the truth from her eyes.

One such instance occurred as they sat together regarding a lantern that he had cunningly contrived from sheets of mica. He regarded it with considerable pride.

"Not so bad, Lovely, to light your dainty footsteps through the Arctic night," he said.

In his casual, offhand manner he had dropped into the habit of occasionally addressing her with the word that symbolized his first impression of her, and Lynne adored the name, the first term of endearment that had ever reached her ears.

"Call me that always, will you?" she inquired. "I like it."

"Nothing else, ever again," he made casual promise. "I'll call you Lovely because that's what you are. I didn't know the true meaning of the word until you stood before me that first day. Then I knew right off that it had been coined to fit you and had been waiting round, sort of, like a fairy mantle, for you to come and don it."

He dropped his hand on hers where it rested on

her knee, and as always at his slightest touch, new and untried emotions stirred in her. In that moment it was in her eyes for him to read, in the uneven fluttering of her breath, but Harrington was still gazing approvingly at the lantern that he had created. She rose and moved off down the basin. Presently Harrington missed the dogs and knew that she had departed on another of her lone excursions.

Of late he had observed in her that same listening at night, the same uneasiness among the dogs that had presaged their meeting with McNair. There was no doubt but that the dogs seemed to sense an alien presence. Could it be McNair, still lingering in the country, or returning after having visited some native camp on the Liard and securing arms? Unlikely, Harrington thought. Had Villiers decided to follow him into this country? It might be that. Old Van Dorn had announced his intention of returning to these parts—but not so soon as this. He grew restive when Lynne failed to return. Loneliness, he reflected, is relative, depending upon whether or not a man expects companionship. When he had traveled the trails alone, expecting no human companionship, he had accommodated his mental attitude to that fact and had not desired it. Now, after several months of daily association with Lynne, he was conscious of a sense of loneliness whenever deprived of her society for an hour. He was about to take a ramble on his own account when Lynne came racing to meet him.

"Quick!" she urged. "The deer are coming and I want you to see for yourself."

They repaired to the plain. The caribou were moving south from the summer range in the Arctic. As far as Harrington could see the vast animal tide rolled across the tundra, thousands and tens of thousands, a sea of tossing antlers, the white ruffs of the bulls flashing in the sun. It was a magnificent spectacle and it seemed without end. For three days the migrating herds swept past without a break.

Thousands of caribou calves accompanied their mothers. Harrington eyed these youngsters speculatively, as earlier he had looked upon the young ducks and geese of the marshes. It would be a relatively simple matter to snare a score or more of these calves on the game trails in the timbered pockets. Perhaps a little earlier in the season would have been better, when they were younger and more apt to prove tractable when captured. It would be an interesting procedure to domesticate them and to establish their own private reindeer herd in the sink hole. Too bad not to try it. But they would be leaving for the outside as soon as the big snows came.

These upland plains were an intermediate point in the caribou migration route. Many of the animals had summered there after the main herds had passed on to the summer range beyond the Circle. Thousands would remain to winter after the bands now traveling had passed on to the south. Harrington

estimated that at least half a million animals passed within view in three days' time. The flashing white ruffs of the bulls presaged an approach of winter. Other wild things, too, were putting on winter garb. The coats of the big hares were turning white. Great flocks of ptarmigans winged down from the crests of the mountains to the westward to winter on the plains. These birds, too, were in the transition stage from summer gray and reddish brown to marble white. Their guttural conversation filled the air of evenings. Wolves, the gray hunters of the North, had come with the caribou to prey upon them. Moose that had sought the high mountains to the westward during the summer months to escape the flies now poured again into the lower country. They traveled not in the vast herds, as did the caribou, but came singly or in little groups.

Nature, having revealed a North that abounded with food in summer, now seemed prepared to parade an even more lavish abundance of food during the winter months.

The bears had not yet sought their winter dens and were still abroad in the berry patches, rolling with fat that would nourish them through the long sleep of hibernation.

"It's time to put up our lard," Lynne announced. "The next heavy storm will drive them into their dens."

They repaired to the choppy country below the edge of the plain where it broke off to the south.

A big black bear fed among the berry bushes on an open shoulder. They stalked to within forty yards and Lynne dropped the animal with an arrow that was driven clear through its body, the head protruding three inches beyond.

The girl's prowess with this primitive weapon was a source of wonder to Harrington. He knew that prior to the snowslide that had wrecked the cabin she had hunted with a rifle. He commented upon her having acquired such proficiency with this new weapon in so short a space of time.

"Yes, but it is not a new weapon to me," she said. "Tanlika made me a tiny one as far back as I can remember, and I was always using it. Later, even after I had hunted with a rifle for years, Tanlika and I shot small game with the bow to conserve ammunition, so you see I was practically raised with one in my hands. I was out after ptarmigans with my bow when the snowslide buried my guns in the cabin."

They dressed out the bear and packed it home, rendering out the fat and adding a portion of the firm tallow of a caribou to give body and stiffness to the soft lard of the bear. Two more bears were bagged within the week.

The dogs exhibited an increasing tendency to listen at night, to rise and sample the wind, as if striving to detect some actual physical evidence of an alien presence that they somehow sensed. On two occasions Lynne departed and remained away

throughout the day, accompanied by her pack, and Harrington knew that she sought to strike the trail of some possible intruder into her domain. It was small use for him to attempt to follow and locate her, once she had eluded his vigilance and departed without him, for she traveled as tirelessly as a native runner and would cover thirty to forty miles a day.

McNair's actions in the spring had always seemed a senseless sort of proceeding without point or reason, for Harrington had never been able to evolve so much as a plausible theory as to the motive. That queer glitter in his eyes, possibly, had resulted from a disordered brain, and the man's deed could be accounted the act of a maniac. Even so, it seemed unlikely that he would have sufficient tenacity of purpose to invade this region again. Villiers might possibly have decided to come up in here in search of Harrington, after finding his dogs still in the Nahanni camp on the Liard. Van Dorn had declared his intention of returning to the country of the phantom falls. He had intended to work up some stream that headed against the divide on the Yukon side, lining a canoe as far as possible, then pack his outfit across by means of dogs, make a sled when winter set in and resume his eastward journey by dog team. There was a possibility, of course, that either Villiers or old Van Dorn might be somewhere in the country. It seemed unlikely that the man who called himself McNair would have returned.

During Lynne's third absence of this sort Har-

rington, increasingly restless without her, dropped down the defile to the river and crossed by canoe, intent upon exploring some of the maze of branch gorges that broke through the walls from the far side of the canyon. He mounted up the bottom of a narrow chute between lofty walls, its course bare of all vegetation and even earth, the rock floor washed smooth by the torrents that had poured down it from the melting snows of every spring for centuries. Now there was but the most minute trickle of water descending. He came out into a wider spot some two hundred yards in length and comparatively flat. Its floor was covered by a heavy deposit of bowlders and coarse gravel. It acted as a natural settling basin, he observed, retaining only rocks and coarse gravel, while all lighter material was swept on through with the rush of spring freshets. In a gold-bearing region it would also act as a natural pocket to trap all coarse gold that might come down. His interest in prospecting, long dormant, was now mildly revived, and he made a tentative excavation in a gravel bed with his staff. A flake of coarse gold rewarded him, then another and another. The gravel was rotten with it.

"If it's as rich as that on top, what will it be on bedrock!" he exclaimed. He made a score of similar excavations throughout the pocket and found every foot of upturned gravel shot through with gold. He hastened back to impart the tidings of

the strike to Lynne but found that she had not returned.

Night came on with no sign of her. Harrington prowled restlessly about. His thoughts reverted to those other night hunts staged by Lynne and her dogs, and he recalled the expression that he had surprised in her eyes when she turned her gaze on McNair, a look that resembled the greenish flare that springs to the eyes of a hunting cat just as it prepares to pounce. He was assailed by uneasy apprehensions of what might occur in case of a possible meeting between Lynne and some stranger who might have penetrated the country. At last he dropped into a troubled slumber.

An hour later, as he groped back toward consciousness, it was with hammering pulse and a hot wine of delight coursing through his veins, an impression of fragrant lips quivering ardently against his own; and on this occasion the face that floated before his dawning consciousness was that of Lynne. This was the second time that he had waked to this same throbbing dream within the past two weeks. It was so realistic that the fragrance of her hair still seemed to hover about him and drug his senses.

"Lynne!" he said suddenly. "Lynne!" The cabin was shrouded in velvet black. He could not see an inch before him and his straining ears detected not the slight rustle. "Lynne! Answer me!"

She could not have returned, he thought, for she waked so instantly at the slightest sound. The re-

currence of this dream troubled him. He must put still greater restraint upon his imagination. Twice of late he had been on the verge of sweeping Lynne into his arms as she leaned against him. Any such demonstration could not be thought of. He was aware of a vast affection and tenderness for Lynne, a sense of responsibility toward her, and he revelled in their comradeship, in the clear if unique workings of her mind. Her beauty was a source of constant delight to him. But this other, the mounting desire to take her in his arms—he must stamp that out entirely. She was too lovely a creature, too sexless and unawakened, for him to permit the least trace of the physical to creep into his relations with her while she was here with him alone. It just would not do at all. She was too utterly dependent upon him. He must do nothing to violate that trust.

Outside a husky lifted its voice in the tribal call and the pack joined in the chorus. Then Lynne had returned, after all, but in all probability she had been too tired to waken when he had spoken her name before.

“Lynne,” he said softly.

Lynne, wide-eyed and still quivering with the delight of her stolen caress, stirred in her own room as if just rousing from slumber, and after a moment answered sleepily, “Yes. What it is?”

CHAPTER IX

For several days Harrington was busily engaged in exploring other branch canyons and in a number of them he found settling basins similar to the first, long flat stretches where the heavier gravel had been caught. Some of these proved to be equally rich in gold. But Lynne remained strangely unexcited.

"There's not sufficient water coming down those canyons now so that we could work that ground," he said. "It would have to be done in summer, after spring freshets are over but while a good head of water is still flowing. We could build sluice boxes during the winter. As rich as that dirt is, I could shovel a million into sluice boxes myself in one summer. It is richer than the Klondike."

"Yes. There is gold in most of those canyons—quantities of it," Lynne assented.

"You know?" Harrington asked in surprise.

"Oh, yes. I've known always," she said.

"But why didn't Pan work that ground? He could have taken out a fortune for both of you."

"To be sure," Lynne agreed. "But he did not intend to go out where gold would benefit him. 'And

I rebel at the thought of useless labor,' he told me. 'Every hour that I should spend extracting gold, instead of profiting me, would mean the sacrifice of an hour out of my remaining allotted time that I should much prefer to devote to other things. Once, in another state of existence, I was King Midas of the golden touch, but the gift failed to provide what I was seeking so I traded jobs with Pan. Now, instead of working to extract gold from one source or another, I prefer to work at extracting from my head such wisdom as may be in it, if any, or in reading such wisdom as other men have been able to extract from theirs.' "

"I've known many to proclaim their scorn for wealth that belonged to others but which was not within their reach, seldom when they themselves were afforded opportunity to acquire it; a subtle difference there. Pan, at least, was consistent," Harrington declared.

"Yes. He viewed the equation in reverse from the way you just stated it, I think" Lynne said, considering. "Instead of scorning wealth for others he considered it very desirable for them, but since he was to remain here, where gold was of no more use to him than the same amount of sand, he scorned it for himself."

"True," said Harrington. "But few men possess the fundamental intelligence to see it in that light. It is less difficult for me to picture the opposite type—the man who, knowing he would never again see

civilization, nevertheless would work feverishly to pile up gold."

"He said that out there so much stress is placed upon the acquirement of wealth that sometimes the purpose of it all becomes obscured. He believed that there were increasing numbers of a certain type of mind that did not view the acquirement of wealth as a means to an end—the end being sufficient means to pursue whatever attainments seemed desirable in life—but instead looked upon it as both means and the end. That type of mind, he said, works on the theory that wealth and full enjoyment of life are synonomous, which is far from true. He told me of one man, representative of many of his acquaintances, who had acquired great means only to discover that there was no end to which he cared to devote it. This man scorned all abstract knowledge that was not intimately concerned with producing wealth, so he did not care for leisure in which to enrich his mind. He had no hobby to indulge, viewing all such as folly. He cared little for travel. He lacked the vision to employ his wealth in vast enterprises to advance the efficiency and prosperity of the human race in emulation of the really great financial geniuses. He was, then, merely an unfortunate, in his position that of a man who had plodded doggedly to the foot of the rainbow to find the pot of gold, only to discover as he held it in his hand that all of it would not purchase another glimpse of the rainbow. Have you known such a man as that?"

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"Scores of them," Harrington smiled. "Since Pan's day the genus is increasing. Pan also realized the desirability of wealth so he must have intended that you should benefit from his strike." He chuckled as the truth of the situation dawned upon him. "Here I've been actively and enthusiastically engaged in rediscovering claims that you had located years ago. I suppose," he conjectured, "that Pan, very sensibly, had instructed you that in case anything should happen to him, you were to inform no human of this strike until after the claims had been recorded, and which accounts for your neglecting to mention it to me."

"Yes," Lynne assented. "He feared that the recording of the claims would bring other gold-seekers in here, so he would not have it done while he still lived. That Father Ruvierre whom I mentioned has the papers."

That was not, however, the primary reason for Lynne's failure to acquaint Harrington with the tidings of those gold deposits. To Lynne all things had a literal translation. She had gathered from Harrington's recitation of months ago that only his lack of wealth had served to separate him from that other woman. By logical reasoning, then, if he should suddenly become possessed of wealth, the only obstacle would be removed and he would rush back to this other love forthwith. She was convinced of the soundness of this conclusion so she had refrained from any mention of the gold. Now, however, he

knew of it through his own efforts. Perhaps she might even utilize his knowledge to detain him here. If that should fail, there were other ways—one in particular that would serve if all others failed.

“Of course you know, Clay, that you can have as much of it as you like,” she said. Then she sat back and waited, half expecting to hear him launch into enthusiastic plans.

Harrington, returning from his mental excursioning on the trail of the departed Pan, encountered an expression in the gray eyes that drew the very soul out of him. In that instant his arms automatically answered the uncontrolled impulse of his brain and extended themselves as if to enfold her. Then full consciousness, reasserting its control, thrust him back into his seat as firmly as a restraining physical pressure and he regarded his half-extended hands with detached curiosity, as if they did not belong to him, then dropped them to his thighs and answered easily:

“Of course you’d say that. But the main consideration is to record those claims so that you will benefit from them; so that you can live to the full the other extreme of life from that you have experienced here; have your own estates and be surrounded by charming people; everything you’ve been deprived of—though I’m not so sure it’s been a deprivation. I’ll see that they are worked to the best advantage for you. And my part doesn’t really matter, for it so happens that I have as much of this world’s goods as I’ll ever need; more, probably.”

She sat for a space in silence pondering this, her former convictions wavering.

"But I thought you were without things—really quite poor." She faltered at last.

"Lord, no," he chuckled. "Wherever did you gather that impression, Lovely? Matter of fact, I'm rated as a rather prosperous citizen; nothing tremendous, you know, but with more than any two or three mortals actually need. Likely I'd have been better off with less these past few years. Then, at least, I'd have been forced to work for my bread and beans, instead of just drifting aimlessly."

He was looking out of the window.

"The snow is coming," he said, as the first few flakes slithered along the mica pane of the window. Except for the throb of the falls, there was a strange hush in the air, as if all the creatures of the wild waited in breathless suspense for the breaking of the storm. Big soft flakes sifted down; thickened until they became a whirling smother of white. For two days and nights the snow descended. Then it cleared and the temperature dropped; a day of calm, then the shrieking gale that always follows a storm in the North. It scoured the snow from exposed spots and piled it deep in the gulches and in great drifts on the down-wind slopes beneath the brows of ridge and cliff. Other storms would follow soon, but the two occupants of the basin could not start upon their long journey until there was sufficient snow on the level to cover the bush. That might be accomplished

by the next heavy storm, but in all probability another two or three storms would pass before the north-country bush would be buried beneath a smooth blanket of white. This first storm of the season was followed by a two-day chinook that softened and packed the drifts before the temperature dropped again to bitter cold.

Harrington, missing Lynne, set out on a ramble of his own and chanced to overtake her as she topped out. Once out upon the plain, she led the way to the south, down over the rims of the big fault and into the choppy country below.

Lynne traveled steadily, flanking the course of the river but remaining a mile or more back from its shores. The wind blew from the river to them, and Harrington knew that she held to this course so that Queen, the one dog she had brought with her, might catch the scent of every creature that moved between them and the river. Also this route insured their own party against detection by canine noses, in the event that any possible intruders along the stream chanced to be accompanied by dogs. It was very evident that she still considered it probable that the actions of the dogs denoted the intrusion of strangers into her domain. The river was the logical route of travel. The snow had been piled in the timber and in the gulches. Lynne held to the open spots that had been cleared of snow by the winds, whenever it was feasible, thus leaving as few tracks as possible. The exercise of all such woodcraft was

so much a matter of course with her that she failed even to comment upon it.

In the drifted snow they observed the tracks of caribou and moose, of wolves and lynxes; the pidgeon-toed waddling trails of porcupines and the wide-spaced double tracks of leaping martens. An otter, striking across country from one stream to another, had left evidence of its buckling jumps in the snow; the four-cornered patterns left by squirrels skipping across the white blanket of snow from tree to tree, the series of triangles that showed the wanderings of hares and the evenly spaced single line of tracks that revealed the passing of a fox. All these were accorded a casual but comprehensive glance by Lynne. Then they encountered the tracks of a huge grizzly. Most of the bears had sought their winter dens with the recent storms and few were now abroad. Perhaps this old chap had been flooded from his retreat by the brief chinook that had followed the storm and he was now in search of better quarters, Harrington mused. Queen sniffed curiously at the tracks of this monster, bristling slightly as if undecided as to just what sort of message the cold tracks conveyed to her nose. She seemed a trifle uneasy and followed along the trail, stopping to look back inquiringly at Lynne. The girl turned and moved slowly along the double line of tracks, carefully inspecting each print. Then she increased her pace. Harrington sensed a certain tenseness about her and when she suddenly whirled

to face him, he again detected in her eyes that strange hard light that he had surprised there on that day when she had looked down from the rims upon McNair—a light that reminded him of the greenish flare that comes to the eyes of a hunting cat.

“What is it, Lynne?” he inquired.

“Two men,” she proclaimed, indicating the tracks with a gesture.

“Hm,” Harrington murmured, inspecting them. “Bear-paw boots? I’ve known the natives of Kodiak Island to make them, and the Aleuts farther to the westward on the Alaskan Peninsula. They cut the hide round the leg near the body and peel it back, leaving the pad and claws on and tan it that way. It makes a good serviceable boot, also an ornamental one. But I didn’t know that the natives of the interior were up to that.”

He examined the tracks closely.

“They look all right; spaced well apart sidewise, alternating properly, and with the prints of hind feet overlapping into the tracks of the front feet at every step. All same way bear she walk. What’s wrong with ’em, Lynne?”

“The claws,” she informed. “They’re crooked.” She stooped to point. “Look at this third claw on the left front foot—it’s turned sidewise and makes almost a flat impression. And this.” One by one she pointed out the deformities of the various claws. No two of them made similar impressions.

Harrington nodded. It was clear to him since she had pointed it out, but if left to his own devices he would not have observed it.

"Tanlika used to make bear-paw boots for me when I was a little tot," Lynne said. "But the pads always dried and drew the claws out of shape. That's what happened to these. The tracks are two days old, but Queen sensed something strange about them. The man in front wears the forefeet and walks with a wide-spraddled gait. The man in rear steps up on the tracks with the hind feet of the bear. Come, I'll show you." Swiftly she followed the trail. Queen bristled again, her nose close to the snow. Lynne inspected the spot.

"A bear doesn't knock the coals from his pipe as a usual rule," she said. And a hundred yards farther along. "Or rest the butt of his gun in the snow." She pointed to the marks beside the tracks. The trail led into a patch of timber and she waved a comprehensive arm. "See. The hind feet wandered off by themselves."

Harrington nodded, viewing two separate sets of tracks, one made by the forefeet of a bear, the other by the hind feet, the two traveling parallel and some twenty feet apart.

"They are camped somewhere about, waiting to pick up our trail and track us home," Lynne said, summing up. "They have brought no dogs with them, for their howling would warn us of the presence of their masters. While they travel about in

bear-paw boots we would not be apt to notice, even if we should cross their trail."

Harrington nodded assent.

The days were now short with but few hours or less of daylight out of every twenty-four. It would be dark in half an hour, so they remained in the patch of timber lest the intruders should be camped at some point where they could sweep a considerable area of country with their glasses. When night shut down they started on the return journey.

"I'll lead," Lynne said. "Step where I do."

Wherever it was possible, she held to bald ridges that had blown free of snow so that they left no tracks. Once out on the upland plains, it was an easy matter to avoid the drifts. In the maze of branching canyons that led down to the river it was not so simple, but she exercised every caution. Once they moved for two hundred yards round a narrow ledge from which they brushed with spruce boughs what little snow remained on it. In such few places as necessitated traveling in the snow, the girl held to the game trails that were littered with tracks of moose and caribou. Before morning their tracks would be blotted out by the hoofs of scores of these animals.

"No man could unravel that trail and find his way in here," Harrington predicted, when they had regained the shelter of the cabin. "All we have to do is to stay under cover here until the big snows come

and we can hook up the dogs and give them the slip."

"They can't find their way in here," she agreed. "But they will learn our general location by the dogs. No power on earth can prevent huskies from holding a midnight serenade."

The only chance for outsiders to find their way into the retreat, Harrington thought, would be by following the ice of the river through the canyon and exploring from below. He mentioned that contingency to Lynne.

"The river never freezes entirely over in the canyon," she said. "The force of the falls breaks it up. Or during an intense cold snap the flow of water is lessened and it runs out from beneath the ice, so it caves of its own weight. They can't travel through on the ice."

"It's our friend McNair again, I suspect," he said. "He made it down to some native camp on the Liard and secured guns and ammunition and a helper; some bad native, likely, who's not above slitting a throat for a profit. Or else McNair tricked him as to the purpose. In either event, he signed his own death warrant. McNair would never let him get back to the Liard alive."

For McNair's attempted deed of the previous spring no longer seemed a senseless thing, the act of a maniac. Those gold claims, richer than the Klondike, furnished adequate motive. McNair, or whatever his real name might be, had knowledge of

them. In view of Pan's failure to return, it seemed likely that, dying, he had encountered McNair and confided the matter to him, promising him a substantial sum in gold to come to the aid of the two women. McNair, no doubt believing that no other human knew of the presence here of the two women, had decided to eliminate them and have the gold for himself. Discovering that Harrington was preceding him into the country, he had included him in his plans. Harrington had no doubt but that one of the men who prowled the hills in bear-paw boots was their acquaintance of the previous spring.

The sub-Arctic winter laid siege to the country. During the next month there were two storms, each of several days' duration, but they failed to precipitate a quantity of snow sufficient for traveling. Harrington knew that the interior was not a deep-snow country, the average depth of snowfall being less than a third of that on the coast slope, and that on some years there was actually too little snowfall back in that region to cover the thick scrubby vegetation and make for easy dog-sled travel through the bush. They could, of course, follow the ice of the river, but a stream so swift and with so many rapids would afford no easy means of progress. There would be treacherous airholes, and overflows beneath the snow. Every time that a foot was planted in an overflow and soaked, it would be imperative to call an immediate halt to dry the member. Otherwise it would freeze within an hour. Such

halts would not accord with the schedule that they would be forced to maintain after making a break from their retreat and starting down country, for the two men who were hunting for them would inevitably strike that trail and follow it at top speed. All things considered, it would be unwise to start out before the big snows came.

But they failed to come, and as Harrington waited he chafed at this enforced inactivity, and his wish to put an end to McNair crystallized into a steady, unfaltering purpose. There were times when he was on the verge of issuing forth, of making a sortie to attempt to discover the two men, surprise them and tear them apart with his bare hands, or to batter them down with club or rock after the manner in which his primitive forebears had been wont to dispose of their enemies. He felt capable of doing it. But he must think of Lynne. In case of failure his back track would lead those two killers to the girl. He must hold himself in check and do nothing that even verged upon recklessness until Lynne was safe at the Simpson post. Then he would arm himself and return to take up the trail of those two miscreants and hunt them down.

There was now but a brief period of light daily, an hour's lifting of the shadows at midday. No sun, merely a vague lightening of the skies. And every night at midnight the husky choir burst into its unearthly serenade in answer to the flaring streamers of the Northern Lights. And Harrington

wondered if the wailing tumult reached the ears of those two patient stalkers in their bear-paw boots. Were they even now peering down from the lofty rims and seeking some route of entrance into the sink hole? Or were they waiting, believing their presence unsuspected and knowing that their intended victims sooner or later must emerge?

Harrington's mental attitude was a fair example of the complex workings of the average brain trained in the inconsistent evasion of civilized modes of thought as contrasted to Lynne's simple direct manner of thinking. His own inclination urged him to stay on here yet some vague sense of duty demanded that he should take Lynne back to the outside world. The presence of those two patient stalkers provided an adequate excuse for prolonging the stay without compromising his conscience by violating his sense of duty, thus actually resulting in the very continuation of his stay that he himself would have chosen if left to his devices without thought of duty. But instead of welcoming the situation that resulted in a measure of fulfillment of his own desire, it served to irritate him.

So, while Harrington chafed, as is the white man's way, Lynne seemed to fall back upon the placid acceptance and serenity that she had been taught by Tanlika's native stoicism. From her surplus stock of furs caught the preceding year she fashioned winter clothing for them both; trousers of caribou skin with the hair on, parkas of

lynx and wolf hides, the hoods faced with an edging of wolverine fur which does not hold the frost of one's breath; knee-length mukluks of caribou skin, ankle-height socks of beaver fur, fur mitts suspended from a rawhide cord worn round the neck.

She had failed to evidence the least apprehension as to their predicament. And Harrington, when he forgot to chafe at the menace that stalked them, seemed to absorb something of the girl's calm, to experience a vast contentment as they sat before the fire in the big living room night after night. His former state of existence, the rush and strife of civilized life, former ambitions, all seemed so far removed as to impress him with a sense of its unreality. Had he actually taken a part in all that or was it but an uneasy dream? More and more frequently he reverted to speculations concerning the possibility of being able to find any true contentment in the hectic rush of civilized society. The mysterious Pan had been unable to find it there, so he had come here in search of it. And he had found it. Villiers, too, had acquired serenity in the wilderness. He might find it here himself—already had found a measure of it; and he would lose that measure, once he returned to the rushing throngs. It wouldn't be bad to stay on here.

The intimacy of their long hours together before the fire had woven itself into the fiber of Harrington's being to a greater degree than he realized. His eyes feasted on her loveliness, the glint of the

firelight on her hair, the perfect curves of her body, the flowing grace of her as she moved about the cabin. Occasionally their glances met and locked and at such moments her eyes seemed to draw him to her as if she had opened her arms to him. And always he sternly resisted his mounting desire for her.

The opposite extremes of her training exerted their appeal in strangely different ways. In the domestic intimacy of the cabin her attraction was that which a beautiful, cultivated woman would exert upon a man of civilized society. When they ran together about the basin for exercise, followed by a score of dogs, her charm seemed that of a lovely savage for an equally primitive male. Sometimes when on these runs he was swept by sudden exultation, fancifully imagining himself a creature of the Stone Age traveling dangerous trails with the mate of his choice, as wild and unrestrained as himself.

One day as Lynne left the cabin Chief crowded past her, coming in, eager to visit his master. For a space he sat beside Harrington, his great head resting on the man's knee, inviting the ministrations of his hand. After a space he wandered off, toenails clicking across the floor. Presently Harrington heard a thud and the big dog came from Lynne's room, dragging an object that he had extracted from beneath her bunk. Harrington, by means of a sharp command, caused him to drop it, and the man examined the thing.

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“Well, I’ll be teetotally damned!” he remarked sincerely, as he divined the purpose of it. The object was one of a pair of stilts, the shaft some seven feet in length. The lower extremity terminated in a caribou hoof that was firmly attached, the skin of the animal’s shank having been cut into strips above the hoof and woven securely about the wooden shank of the stilt. The purpose of the thing was clear. Lynne could mount these stilts and travel at will about the country. Where she left a track in the snow it would be the track of a caribou. In a region swarming with the animals, she could hold largely to game trails and within a few hours her own tracks would be trampled out. Even where she might move across untracked snow she could imitate the stride of a caribou, and only by the closest inspection by an expert tracker could the difference be detected. In a country literally tracked up by tens of thousands of caribou, no man would be apt to accord careful and suspicious scrutiny to the track of any one animal. And in the gloom of the sub-Arctic night the ruse would be practically immune from detection.

The foot rest, instead of the usual wooden step attached at right angles to the shaft of the stilt, consisted of a fur-lined stirrup securely toggled to the shaft some two feet from the lower extremity. Thus Lynne could thrust her moccasin-shod feet deep into this warm stirrup, whereas the customary wooden step, if used in these bitter winter tempera-

tures, would soon cause one's. Any how a man gets endurance. The thing was when I heard that chorus maneuvered the enemy—any a night spent in the upon their bear-paw boots. those dogs are malemutes.

Harrington replaced the difference, just hearing tally applauding her ing's of that chorus certainly ioned a second pair of ston roadhouses with the male- They could pack their night serenade outside. I the sleigh, which H

In case McNair she wondered about Lynne. She believe them to be sleeper, waking at the slightest when well down of his dressing and leaving the ferred to the sleigh used her. Queer that she had not could travel fast at least. With an odd sense of Simpson post a amiss, he stepped back into the Mackenzie, h

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He reached the river and halted. The water, black and ominous, swirled past a few feet below him. The ice had gone out! The intense cold of

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"Well, I'll be true to that. And the vapor from the sincerely, as he divined, springs, rising to meet the object was one of a pair, formed into a white curtain seven feet in length. Tormed into a white curtain nated in a caribou hoof bottoms from the view of the skin of the animal's shaft of howling roused Harstrips above the hoof and w, uring the night. Chief wooden shank of the stilt. the door. He rose, thing was clear. Lynne could the nukluks and stepped and travel at will about the co round him. That left a track in the snow it would us, sensing things caribou. In a region swarming grasp, there could she could hold largely to game ily, half growling. a few hours her own tracks would nmediate danger. Even where she might move across sink hole, they she could imitate the stride of a caribou, hing down to by the closest inspection by an expert t nothingly to the difference be detected. In a countr, tracked up by tens of thousands of caribou, would be apt to accord careful and sus, ve dogs, scrutiny to the track of any one animal. And It the gloom of the sub-Arctic night the ruse would ved practically immune from detection."

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much difference, but some. Funny how a man gets flashes out of nowhere; but when I heard that chorus my mind hopped back to many a night spent in the Yukon camps. Wonder if those dogs are malemutes. Doubt if I could tell the difference, just hearing them—but the vibrations of that chorus certainly floated me back to Yukon roadhouses with the malemutes staging a midnight serenade outside. I wonder now.”

Also he suddenly wondered about Lynne. She was such a light sleeper, waking at the slightest sound. The stir of his dressing and leaving the cabin must have roused her. Queer that she had not joined him by now at least. With an odd sense of something gone amiss, he stepped back into the cabin.

“Lynne!” he called. “There’s a dog team somewhere out yonder. Did you hear?”

There was no answer. With a sinking sensation that was almost physical nausea he walked straight in, unannounced. His groping hand informed him that the caribou-stilts, too, were absent from beneath her bunk. Seizing his mits, he drew the hood of his parka about his head, plunged from the cabin and started for the mouth of the defile that led to the river, the dogs surging at his heels. He checked them over. Queen was missing.

He reached the river and halted. The water, black and ominous, swirled past a few feet below him. The ice had gone out! The intense cold of

the past week had reduced the flow and the water level had receded three or four feet. The ice had caved of its own weight and the broken cakes had been swept away by the current. New ice would soon form, but it in turn would be shattered. Ice would not hold for long in this canyon. Either it would cave when the water receded or buckle as it rose. And if the water level remained the same for long, then the battering of the falls would hammer it from its moorings or send a flood of water pouring across its surface to furrow out channels.

The big cakes of the recent cave-in had formed ice gorges at intervals. He could see one looming dimly below, precluding possibility of using a canoe to reach the foot of that sloping ledge by which he must attain the crevice that led to the top. He glanced to the right. A narrow margin of ice, a mere clinging shelf, still adhered to the cliff some four feet above the present water level, the ice having cracked and parted there at the time of the cave-in instead of at its junction with the rock. And there, in the film of snow atop the ice, were Lynne's tracks.

A chill struck through Harrington's system but he did not hesitate. There were Lynne's tracks and he followed them, trusting his weight to that frail stringer of the clinging ice shelf, first having ordered the dogs to remain. The shelf gave forth an ominous cracking sound as if about to give way under his weight. If a man should be plunged into that black water, even if he should succeed in swimming

back to the landing, he would be frozen stiff as an icicle before he could travel the mile to the cabin. The temperature was fifty below at the least estimate, probably sixty. He traversed the frail shelf of ice for two hundred yards and attained the foot of the ledge that angled up to the mouth of the crevice by way of which he must start for the top. The snow on the floor of the crevice revealed caribou tracks.

Lynne had mounted her stilts upon reaching the ledge. Harrington stooped to examine the tracks. There were five lines of them, three pointing up-country and but two returning. And suddenly he divined the reason for Lynne's silence regarding the stilts. They had not been intended as a surprise for him but to provide a secret means whereby she could mount to the top without fear of leaving her trail and spy upon the enemy while Harrington slept. She had taken matters into her own hands, assuming all of the risk to protect him, more confident of her own ability to cope with the situation than of his. With a reputation the length of the Yukon for personal daring he had been calmly sleeping on at least two previous occasions when Lynne had gone out alone. He emitted a short, half-angry laugh at the irony of the thing and mounted swiftly on her trail.

He knew, too, that the situation had resulted from his own words in the spring, his announcement that men did not expect their women to go in for that

sort of thing. Lynne, rather than displease him, had permitted McNair to escape that day on the river. Now, knowing that the situation must be remedied, she still felt the necessity of concealing her purpose from him to avoid his displeasure. Harrington cursed himself for having uttered that smug pronouncement. Now, instead of a sense of shock at divining her purpose, he was conscious of a curious elation, a fierce pride in her. A few hours past she had sat with him before the fire in the cabin, a vision of loveliness, calm and unperturbed, and the civilized part of him had responded to the picture.

Now she had reverted to the other extreme, slipping out to brave that precarious clinging shelf of ice and to prowl the hills in the gloom of the Arctic night, a primitive creature unafraid to pit her skill against that of two dangerous beasts with the odds against her. And now the primitive male in him rose in fierce response to that part of her, and he started for the top at his best speed, committed to hunt for McNair until he should feel that miscreant's throat between his hands.

But he knew, too, that it was rather unwise for him to venture from their retreat and leave his tracks in the snow. It might upset her plans, might even occasion disaster to them both. But he could not picture himself remaining down below while she was up there alone. Besides, it was beginning to spit snow. Perhaps there would be sufficient to blot out his trail. If only he could locate McNair and

that other miscreant, there surely would be a fighting chance for him to rush them from close quarters before they could use their guns. It might be that the driver of that dog team was a stranger to McNair and would prove to be an ally, if only he could locate him. Not likely, though. Probably a third party, bringing in supplies for the enemy. The wind was rising to a gale. That would cover the sound of his movements. And the whirling snowflakes were coming faster now, rapidly turning into a blinding smother. He topped out on the edge of the upland plains.

Then from somewhere out ahead, closer now, not over a mile away he judged, there sounded again a canine chorus, the combined voices of eight or ten dogs launched on the wind of the gathering storm. And again Harrington's thoughts were swiftly carried back to Yukon roadhouses while the male-mutes staged midnight serenades outside.

CHAPTER X

HARRINGTON wondered if the dogs that had howled were still on the trail or if their owner had made camp. The snow drove slantingly down into his face. That was well. He had the wind on them. And he knew that Lynne would stay on the downwind side of the camp or, in case the dogs were still on the march, that she would flank the route of travel. Therefore she could not be far away. The wind had a steady push and the air was now so heavily laden with flying snow as to give him the impression that he waded upstream. It was impossible to see far through that combination of black night and the driving smother of white flakes. His field of view was restricted to a radius of but very few feet.

This fact brought him a sense of solid satisfaction. It would work to his advantage. An armed man would find his gun useless at a distance of over a dozen feet. The arrival of those dogs, however, complicated the equation. It would be extremely difficult to approach a camp in which there were dogs. Then, too, it meant that there were now three men to be reckoned with.

It was only the background of Harrington's consciousness, however, that was concerned with such speculations. His every conscious faculty was alert to his surroundings. His eyes were of little use as he could not see a dozen feet through the blinding storm. Nevertheless he strained them for a glimpse of any possible movement. He listened intently for any sound that might rise above the wind and the slither of snow—the sound of sled runners, the whine of a dog, the voice of the driver lifted in a command to his team.

He halted abruptly, crouching low and poised to spring, as a dim shape, a mere deepening of the obscurity, loomed just ahead. Gradually, it took on nebulous wavering shape and he knew it for the trunk of a tree, its upper portions obscured from view, and he advanced to its shelter. Other forms loomed dimly close at hand, taking on the semblance of ghostly human forms—the trunks of trees whose tops were invisible in the storm. A man could stand motionless among them and the keenest of eyes could not distinguish between the single human and the topless trunks about him. But a dog's nose would detect it instantly, if down wind, even if far beyond range of vision. He wondered where Lynne could be located. Prowling somewhere near. Queen's nose would serve well in such an upwind stalk. As he moved silently to the next trunk ahead, he speculated curiously upon the fact that for all that his powers of sight could determine, he might be moving up

to a man. He could see the object to a height no greater than a man's head. It would be odd to move up, expecting to take shelter behind a trunk and to discover only when he touched it that the object was a man. He wished that he had brought Chief with him. Then he could advance without hesitation. But Chief would growl at the wrong moment. Not so with Queen. The big husky was trained to a hair and seemed to divine the wishes of her mistress.

As he moved to the next tree a hanging festoon of moss, leaping in the wind, flashed suddenly before his eyes with the semblance of a swinging arm and struck him in the face. He almost struck back at it, then chuckled silently.

He sensed the presence of humans. Somehow, he knew that others were somewhere close at hand. Well, why not? This timbered depression near the rims of the sink hole constituted an ideal camp site for any who would spy upon its occupants. And undoubtedly McNair had located their retreat by the nightly serenades of the huskies but had been unable to find his way into it. But how was he so certain that humans were near? Whence came his knowledge? Often in the past Harrington had speculated upon those strange hunches or intuitions that come suddenly to men in the open—the certain knowledge that game is near, even to its variety,—deer, bear or moose as the case may be. He had attributed the occurrences to messages received over the paths of the physical senses, some stray ribbon

of scent, some faint vibration of sound, too slight to register a striking impression upon the dulled physical perceptions of man but sufficient, nevertheless, to stir some almost atrophied cell to sluggish action that resulted in a vague knowledge. Whatever the source, Harrington knew that there were humans about.

He advanced cautiously for a hundred yards, then froze in his tracks. He had caught the dim murmur of voices ahead and a little to one side, barely audible, then silence. His spine prickled with the age-old instinct to bristle the hair where hair has ceased to grow, and he turned toward the spot. Then the acrid taint of wood smoke smote his nostrils briefly and was gone. That was it! Long before the sound of voices or the smell of smoke had been of sufficient strength to carry a distinct message to his brain, his subconsciousness, harking back ten thousand generations to that time when the physical perceptions of his ancestors had functioned as delicately as those of beasts, had fastened upon the fact.

And now he himself had harked back ten thousand generations, and he moved silently upon the camp of his enemies, prepared to pounce like a killing beast, yet using the caution of a stalking cat. There was no further murmur of voices. Then wood smoke assailed his nostrils again. He froze at attention. A dull glow seemed to waver just ahead. He watched it intently but could not determine whether

or not it was merely a dancing occasioned by straining his eyes against the storm. He advanced ten cautious steps. The glow was barely perceptible through the shrouding storm, but unmistakable. A camp. A fire, sheltered, no doubt, by a wind-break on the upwind side, but open on his own side; but whether it was twenty feet removed from him, or fifty, he was unable to determine. He moved forward one step, another, then halted as a voice spoke, seemingly in his very ear.

"We ought to hear him coming—or passing, damned soon now," it predicted. "Those dogs weren't over a mile away when they howled last time."

The voice was that of McNair, and again Harrington felt that prickling of the spine as if the long-dead cells of hairs sought to erect themselves into a bristling roach. He heard another voice reply in some native dialect.

"His dogs will bring him straight to the camp if he gives 'em their heads," McNair predicted.

Now, if ever, was the time. In a very short space of time, the driver of the dog team would arrive, increasing the odds against Harrington three to one, in addition to the certainty of detection by the dogs. He must act on the instant, advance until he could make out one man, preferably McNair, pounce on him and seize his gun, turn it on the pair of them and drop them in their tracks. Then he could handle the new arrival.

A form loomed against the glow, dimly. Was it ten feet, or twenty? Another cautious step, and there was a sudden interruption to his plan.

From out in the night, perhaps a hundred yards beyond, a voice was lifted in a hail.

"Ho! Ho, the camp!"

The figure before Harrington had disappeared and McNair's voice came in a tense whisper.

"Off to the left and ahead to meet him! I'll go to the right."

The two men had moved away from the fire. Why such caution, when a hail would have brought the newcomer into camp? Harrington's chance was gone for the present. If only he had acted sooner by a single second.

"Ho!" the voice called again, from fifty yards beyond. "Ho!"

Harrington advanced swiftly. Two steps carried him within six feet of a flickering fire. Beyond it, merging with the storm, stood a small shelter of caribou skins, and behind the skin teepee a log windbreak had been erected. Harrington moved past the fire to grope round for the ax that must be somewhere close at hand.

Out in the storm there sounded a rifle shot, a single cry of surprise, the snarling of dogs, another shot, a third and fourth in rapid succession, the anguished howl of a dog in mortal agony, two more shots; then silence, save for the snarling struggles of the dogs. It had all happened so suddenly that Harrington's

move to the fire resolved itself into a swift trip past it. Even the one groping sweep of his hand in an effort to locate the handle of the ax that must repose against the windbreak was interrupted by a whirling commotion of snow at the edge of the firelight as McNair returned. Harrington, leaping behind a tree, felt certain that the man must have seen him. What did this murder mean? And the slaying of dogs. McNair stood on the opposite of the fire, facing Harrington across it, scant ten feet separating them, his rifle half-raised before him. McNair called some command in a native dialect and received a grunted reply from off in the storm.

"Damned fool!" McNair snorted. "Why didn't he fire one shot and drop his man? One can never be sure of hearing a single shot on a winter's night. It might be cracking ice, or a rock or tree trunk popping with the frost. But a general cannonading like that! He should have made one shot answer and put the ax to the dogs. Hurry it!" he shouted. "Don't reload and do any more shooting, you fool. Club the rest of those dogs with your gun and put an end to that uproar."

Apparently the native understood the substance of the remarks. There sounded a dull heavy blow, the savage snarl of a dog, another thud. To reach McNair it would be necessary for Harrington to leap across the fire directly into the muzzle of that rifle. And McNair was quick of wit, swift as a cat physically. But time was short if it was to be done

before the native finished his bloody work and returned. It must be without weapons, for it was impossible for Harrington to move from behind his tree for so much as a split second to seize even a stick of wood from the pile against the windbreak. If only McNair would turn.

“Brains of a bedbug!” McNair snarled, as another long-drawn howl sounded from the storm and another thudding blow. “Won’t he ever be through!”

Suddenly from far below there came a chorus of canine voices from the sink hole.

“He’s roused the whole country,” McNair growled. “And got their dogs stirred up. I’ve a notion to—”

The threat was never finished, for he turned his head to listen, and Harrington, springing on the instant, dropped him with a terrific blow behind the ear. McNair’s heavy fur parka hood broke the force of the blow and though he went down like a felled ox, his brain was working with its usual precision. Even in the act of falling he endeavored to whirl and bring his rifle into play, but Harrington pounced as his enemy dropped, his knees in McNair’s middle, his hands clamped on the rifle. McNair retained his grip on the weapon and wrenched himself sidewise with a mighty heave.

As they faced each other on their knees, both gripping the gun, McNair called some native name once. “Quick!” he added. One hand gripped the barrel of the rifle, the other was clamped on the stock, which gave him a wide leverage, and at the

instant of speaking he pressed up with his left hand and down with his right in a whirling motion designed to twist the weapon from Harrington's hands.

Harrington set his muscles to counteract this twist, at the same instant rising to his feet and dragging McNair with him. It was, he knew, but a matter of seconds. McNair had only to retain his grip until the native could cover the few intervening yards and shoot Harrington down. He must jerk McNair out of the tiny circle of dim light cast by the fire, out into the gloom of the storm, where the native, too, would be handicapped, unable to distinguish readily between the two struggling figures. This flashed to his mind even as he rose. McNair, equally swift, brought up one foot and planted it firmly against Harrington's middle, his hands still gripping the rifle, and straightened himself, throwing all the strength of his shoulders into a backward heave. The opposing force of that thrusting foot and pulling shoulders exerted a terrible strain upon Harrington and nearly broke his grip upon the rifle. He lunged backwards in an effort to jerk McNair off balance, failed, then saw a vague shape just behind his opponent and drove straight at it. McNair's head struck solidly against the tree and the jar of it loosened his planted foot. They fell together with Harrington on top, and McNair promptly threw both legs round his opponent's body in an effort to hold him there.

Harrington lurched to his feet with McNair's legs

still locked round him, steadied himself preparatory to driving McNair against the tree with all his force, but changed tactics on the instant. Six feet away, wavering in the edge of the vague illumination cast by the fire, there appeared the fur-fringed face of a native, and below it was the thrusting muzzle of a rifle, both seemingly detached from all other objects, the head apparently bodiless, the rifle barrel appearing to sway in mid-air without support.

Without an instant's hesitation Harrington wheeled to interpose McNair's form as a living shield between himself and this new menace, then drove headlong at the apparition. A sibilant twang sounded once, sharply, in his ears as he plunged. McNair's back collided violently with the native, who collapsed at the impact and the two struggling forms tripped on his prostrate form and fell beyond him together, still locked in a struggle for the rifle. Even as he struck the ground, Harrington leaped erect, dragging his adversary with him, and whirled to present McNair's back to the native. The dark form was still prone in the trampled snow, sprawled strangely on its face, arms outstretched, and Harrington planted one foot upon it to hold it there, bracing himself to twist the disputed weapon from McNair. But even as his muscles tensed for the effort, something leaped straight out of the gloom of the storm, an apparition that appeared to be a devil's mask of gleaming fangs. A furred body, driven by a hundred pounds of energy and sinew, brushed

Harrington and the fangs struck McNair's thigh, and sliced it to the bone.

McNair released his grasp upon the rifle and leaped away. Two bounds carried him to the log windbreak behind the tent. With one sweep of his hand he found the ax, the blade of which had been stabbed lightly into the end of a log, wrenched it free, and aimed one blow at the dog that had slashed at him again, then leaped back at Harrington.

The energy behind his own backward tug, coincident to McNair's unexpected release of the rifle, had precipitated Harrington flat upon his back. Snatching off his right mitt as he fell, his thumb was sliding back across the lock for the feel of the hammer as he struggled to one knee. He heard the click of its cocking and his forefinger found its way inside the trigger guard none too soon. McNair died in the air as the rifle spoke, and Harrington dodged the descending ax as it fell. Again that sibilant twang had assailed his ears as he pressed the trigger. Swiftly he worked the lever of the rifle and turned his attention to the prone form of the native. Odd that he should have collapsed so suddenly at the impact of McNair's back. He could be no more than stunned, that one, and would soon be coming out of it. Then Harrington found himself staring, incredulous. A stain of red was slowly spreading in the trampled snow, and his fascinated gaze was riveted on a copper-tipped shaft that protruded a full six inches from the native's arm pit.

He had been pierced through from side-to-side just as the two struggling figures had collided with him, dead before he struck the ground.

Queen stood menacingly above McNair, watching for a flicker of movement. But the man did not move. He had fallen on his face—and protruding from his back was a similar length of copper-tipped shaft. Rifle ball and arrow had struck him simultaneously.

“Lynne!” Harrington called. “Lynne!”

“Yes,” the girl answered from so near that it startled him.

She joined him in the dim firelight. He rested a hand on her shoulder. “Quick work, Lynne,” he complimented. “They’d have had me, except for you and Queen.”

She looked down at the two sprawled figures, shuddered and averted her gaze with a little moan of horror, and moved away from him into the murk of falling snow. He followed and she turned and clung to him.

“They were vipers, unfit to belong to the human herd, a menace to all their kind,” he soothed. “Their death means life to better folks that they would have killed. Even just now they murdered some poor devil over there. So it’s all right, the best way out. But I wish things had broken so that I could have dropped the miserable varmints myself, instead of its falling to your lot.”

“But what possible difference could that make?”

she asked surprisingly, steadying herself. "It isn't a question of which of us occasioned it. It's seeing them! Don't you understand? I have no regrets. If I could snap my fingers and wish all of their breed on the face of the earth a sudden and painless death, I'd do it in a second. But I wouldn't want to see it! It was the sight of them lying there, that—that sickened me."

Here again her amazing complexity was evidenced, or rather, Harrington reversed himself, her amazing simplicity and direct clarity of thought. She was not, as he had imagined, in the least concerned as to her part in the matter. That was negligible. Hers was merely the natural reaction of a healthy normal being at the sight of a human form from which life had fled. Harrington knew that feeling too. He had seen much violence and bloodshed, sudden death, but a lifeless human form still remained to him the most depressing sight in life. He was glad that it was that, rather than the whip of conscience over violating some long-prescribed taboo, that troubled Lynne.

"We're well out of it," he said. "And you'll forget after a while, Lovely."

"You still call me that?" she asked.

"Why, of course," he said.

"But you said that men didn't expect women to go in for that sort of thing."

"Oh! That!" he said, remembering, as if recalling a statement made ages in the past. "Yes. Because

they didn't wish their women to experience the unpleasantness of such scenes. 'That's all.'

"I understand now," she said, after an interval of silence. "And it is quite right too."

"We must see to that poor devil at once, Lynne," Harrington said. "There's a bare possibility that a spark of life remains."

He took a stick from the fire, waving it briskly to keep the glowing end alive. Queen led him straight to the spot. He stripped great handfuls of the curling outer bark from a birch, thrust the end of the smouldering brand into it and blew lustily. The inflammable bark flared as so much gunpowder and blazed fiercely as he added more bark and such small dead sticks as he could find by reaching above him and snapping them from the trees. Then he returned to secure an armful of dry wood from the camp.

Near the tangled heaps of dead dogs, still snarled in their harness and already sifted over with snow, Harrington found a limp human form and carried it to the fire. Then Lynne heard him cursing McNair and expressing the wish that the man might have been endowed with the proverbial nine lives of a cat so that he might have the pleasure of killing him in as many different ways.

"What is it?" she asked.

"An old friend of mine," he said. "Old Van Dorn. They killed him in cold blood. He was one of the finest old men that ever breathed."

And that testimony, uttered in all sincerity by a loyal friend, served as the old prospector's epitaph when his mortal remains had been claimed at last by the North he had loved so well. And as if to usher out his hardy spirit in appropriate fashion, the blizzard raged for three days and nights and covered the whole north half of a continent beneath the deepest layer of snow that had fallen in a dozen years.

CHAPTER XI

SOME three days after parting from Harrington on the Liard, Villiers, making camp in the evening, saw a canoe gliding downstream near the opposite shore. There was something about the single occupant that identified him as a white man. Villiers lifted his voice in a friendly hail. There was the least suspicion of a break in the rhythmic sweep of the stranger's paddling, but the canoe veered close to the far shore and was lost to view in the gathering dusk.

"He grows deaf," Villiers said. "But no—he heard my hail. Why did he not put in? Could it have been another?"

Three days later he reached a small camp of Nahanni Indians.

"Was the white man who came down-river some days back the same one who has followed down behind the break-up of the ice on so many springs?" Villiers inquired of them.

The natives shrugged their inability to do more than conjecture. It seemed probable, one man volunteered, for the canoe had held close under the far shore and the occupant answered no hails, as

was the custom of the one of whom Villiers spoke. The native crossed himself. The meaning of the gesture he did not know, except that it had been imported by some member of the Nahanni clan who had made a pilgrimage to trade with the white men on the Mackenzie and that it brewed much magic to placate harmful spirits. And it might be well to make a gesture of placation now, for was it not whispered that this one of whom Villiers spoke was no man at all but the spirit of the Old Man of the North, who lived in the spray of the phantom falls? Older men of the tribe said that the Old One had first come drifting down-river over forty years before. Sometimes he would not appear for years. Then would come a spring when his canoe was seen gliding again down-river behind the break-up of the ice, the lone paddler silent as the grave. One old witch woman of the Nahanni had said that she could see through the paddler, that his shape was not of flesh and blood but of vapor—spray, no doubt, from the phantom falls. The native crossed himself again. No Nahanni would go far up the river upon which the falls were supposed to be, he said. It was not good.

Villiers proceeded far up the Liard and then branched off up a tributary stream that headed against the divide. He met two different families of the vanishing Ikluts, shy as the creatures of the forest. But Villiers was known to them, and they remained to converse with him instead of deserting

their teepees and taking to the brush as they would have done at the approach of any stranger, even a Nahanni. At last he reached the home range of Klatakan, a very ancient native. The howling of Iklut dogs apprised him of the location of the teepee, set well back from the river, and he sought it. Klatakan and his squaw greeted him warmly.

"Did a white man come this way in the spring?" Villiers inquired.

"In the night," Klatakan informed him. "Following the day that the ice went out."

"Was it the Old One?" Villiers asked.

Klatakan thought not. The Old One had been his friend for many years and would have stopped.

"Could it have been that other—the one who comes from the setting sun to seek yellow high-trade sand?"

Klatakan doubted that too. This other one came from the west behind his dogs when the snow was on in the winter, explored the creeks for the yellow sand in the summer months, and traveled back into the west again when the snows fell in the fall. Besides, he too would have stopped at Klatakan's teepee. Why should he have violated custom doubly? This man who had passed in the night had come from the setting sun behind his dogs in the winter, but he did not intend to return to the west behind them when the snow should fall again.

"And why do you think that?" Villiers asked.

"Because he deserted his dogs, traveling so fast

by canoe that they could not keep the pace along the shore, and two of them came back to my camp. No doubt the others starved."

"Perhaps it was some Nahanni that had gone up there to trap when the snow was on," Villiers suggested. "And when the ice went out he made a canoe, and was returning downstream to his people."

"No. The dogs were of the west, like those that drew the sleigh of the one who comes to look for the yellow sand. What you call those dog?"

"Malemute," Villiers suggested.

"Yes. So they were," Klatakan said.

"How long has this man been coming from the west?" Villiers asked. "And what name does he give himself?"

"He has been coming eight years now," Klatakan informed. "And he is named Laverne."

Villiers knew of Laverne. On the Yukon slope he was rated as a mysterious character who, in common with old Van Dorn and a few others, made long trips back into this interior region.

"This man Laverne makes strange medicine," Klatakan added. "He sits and gazes at five little slabs of birch bark, upon which there are marks of some sort. And a queer glow creeps into his eyes as if his mind had been touched by the Great Spirit."

"Um," said Villiers. "Out toward the setting sun they phrase it differently but with the same meaning. When they see that strange intensity in the eyes of a

man who has been too much alone, they say that he has missed one too many boats."

"It is very bad to be without a boat," Klatakan sagely observed.

"And when did you tell Laverne the story of the Old Man of the North?" Villiers demanded suddenly.

"Only last year," the old native testified.

"Tell no other," Villiers advised. "The Old One would be very angry."

Late in the summer Villiers returned down the Liard. He found that Harrington's dogs were still up at the Nahanni camp, evidence that his friend was still up in the country north of the Liard. He elected, instead of waiting for Harrington here, to go on down to the trading post at the mouth of the Liard where it flowed into the giant Mackenzie and to wait there for the coming of his friend.

The traders had come down in the spring on their annual trip with supplies for the posts. While Villiers was at the Simpson post, the boats came back up-river, laden with a year's take of fur. They had yet another thousand miles to journey into the south by stream and lake before they would arrive at the end of the railroad. And they would travel fast, if they were to reach it before freeze-up. A hundred miles south of Simpson post they would have to cross the Great Slave Lake, a vast body of water twelve thousand square miles in extent, and dangerous to navigate with small flat-bottomed river craft.

From down-river, with the boats of the traders,

came a bearded priest of the North, one Ruvierre. He was short and thick-set, slightly stooped and with a forward thrust to his head. His long brown beard shot through with white, hung almost to his knees. Through the beltcord of his flowing black cassock was thrust a crucifix so huge that at first glance one mistook it for a broadsword. In appearance he resembled an ancient musk-ox. His black eyes lighted with pleasure at sight of Villiers.

"Most fortunate," he said. "You must help me. He has not come to the Mackenzie in over two years now. It is time to act, and I am too old to travel fast."

"Over two years," Villiers echoed reflectively. "Yes. We must look into things."

CHAPTER XII

THE winds that followed the big storm had shrieked savagely for days but had now subsided somewhat, presaging a calm. Harrington sat before the blazing logs in the big fireplace, his mind engaged with the details of preparation for the start on their journey to the outside. As soon as this after-storm gale ceased, they would be off.

Lynne slipped from the cabin and traveled swiftly to the defile that afforded outlet to the river, but she did not enter it. The time for entering that deep narrow fissure was past for the winter. The walls rose for a thousand feet and above those first rims an abrupt slope pitched up for several hundred yards to the foot of the upper wall that terminated in a flat-top plateau. Lynne had examined this spot after the first snow. At one point that intermediate slope was steep as a church roof.

Lynne knew that the winds of the past few days had scoured the snow from the flat top above, blowing it over the cliff to settle in heavy drifts on that steep slope. There should be an average depth of thirty feet of snow there now, clinging as precariously as an inch of new snow clings to a church

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steeple. It was a well defined snowslide route and there was never a winter when that treacherous mass failed to descend and block the defile that led to the river. As a consequence, the occupants of the basin had never used the river route after the big snows came. At best the going was bad, as Harrington had discovered upon the occasion when the lowering of the stream level had permitted the ice to cave, leaving only that precarious shelf. And they never knew at what instant the slide might come down.

Harrington believed that there was but one route of exit from the sink hole; and Lynne, with a very definite object in mind, had concealed from him the information that there was another. A narrow ledge led slantingly up the walls until it pinched out into nothingness. At that point a heavy rawhide ladder swung in a slender crevice that led up to a second sloping shelf. Three such stretches brought one to the top. It was the regular winter trail and Lynne, even in summer, used it much more frequently than the longer route by way of the river, unless accompanied by the dogs.

Lynne had waited for that slide. With so heavy a weight of snow on that steep rock slope it should have occurred almost before the winds had finished piling it there. Any hour now one might expect to hear it. But it might also, through some unexplained freakishness, violate custom by hanging on for weeks. For three days, ever since the winds had started sifting the new snow over the cliff and de-

positing it on such old snow as had fallen there from preceding storms, Lynne had listened anxiously for the sound of the avalanche. The wind was receding now and Harrington was preparing to make the start for the long journey to that outside world from which she had determined to detain him. One more day, now—two at best, and he would be starting.

Well, if the slide declined to start of its own accord, there were ways. Lynne knew the tremendous energy generated by heavy bowlders liberated on a steep incline. She had watched them plunge down a slope, gathering force and snapping trees a foot in diameter. A few such, precipitated from the upper rims upon that treacherous mass of white that clings to the slope below would touch it off. She retraced her way, passed the cabin and mounted the slope through the timber to the foot of the walls and started the ascent by way of the winter trail. Topping out at the head of a rock chute down which the uppermost of the rawhide ladders was suspended, she came out upon a little bench just below the upper rims. This was graced by a dog corral in which were a score of small individual dog houses built of logs and with drop curtains of caribou skin across the little doorways. It had been the custom to bring the dogs to this spot before freeze-up every fall and leave them here throughout the winter. Then the occupants of the basin could mount to the top by the route over which Lynne had just ascended, hook a string of dogs to a sleigh and start.

The corrals, of course, were empty now, unoccupied for the first time in a quarter of a century at this time of year, and the little dog houses seemed but mounds of snow.

Beyond the corrals, out on the flat-topped tongue of land that rose above the defile, its surface freed of snow by the winds of the past few days, were many dark objects—boulders poised on the brink of the cliff. An observer who divined Lynne's purpose would have pronounced the arrangement almost providential. But Lynne had arranged all this long since. Frequently, on her lone excursions before freeze-up, she had resorted to this spot and had freed boulders from their beds, rolling them to the very lip of the cliff. Now everything was ready to her hand.

She neared the edge cautiously, sprawled flat and peered down over the cliff. At its foot, far below her, that intermediate slope, steep as a church roof and now covered with many feet of drifted snow, pitched abruptly down to the dark gash that was the course of the defile that led from the sink hole to the river.

Lynne rose and by use of a pole for a lever she precipitated the first big boulder over the brink. There was a splintering crash as it struck some outcropping point on the face of the cliff and was catapulted out into space, a dull thud as it plunged into the mass of snow far below with tremendous force. The boulders were poised at the brink of

the cliff at ten-foot intervals. The girl stepped from one to the next, slipped the end of her lever beneath each in turn and with an almost effortless thrust sent it after its fellows. More than fifty rocks had been arranged there in case of necessity but she had need of but few of them. Even as she toppled the fifth rock from its place there was a slithering sound from below. That great mass of snow, clinging but precariously to that smooth rock slope that was a natural snowslide route and almost ready to start from its own weight, had been touched off by the jar of the first few rocks that crashed down mightily from that lofty height. The slithering sound increased to an ominous roar and terminated in a reverberating boom that seemed to rock the foundation of the earth, as a million tons of snow shot over the lip of the sheer walls at the foot of the slope and fell to the floor of the narrow defile.

Already Lynne was running swiftly toward the head of the winter trail and descending the first rock chute by means of the rawhide ladder with the agility of a squirrel.

Harrington, seated comfortably before the fire in the cabin, was engaged in speculation as to how McNair had become aware of the presence of the gold deposits. Already Harrington had linked the Old Man of the North with the tales of the bearded stranger who sometimes turned up at isolated trading posts on the Yukon slope to purchase supplies, paid for them and departed. The gold-seeking fra-

ternity, ever suspecting a new strike and determined to be in the rush for it, had whispered that this stranger whose trail disappeared into the unknown reaches of the interior had made a fabulous strike and some had sought to follow him. Had McNair been one of these, hanging on more tenaciously than the rest? Perhaps. And then he might have heard the mutterings of the Moccasin Telegraph about the Old Man of the North who lived in the spray of the phantom falls. Possibly natives of the Liard had told him of strange dog-sled trails that pointed into this region of winters, of mysterious phantom canoes that passed along the streams of summers, and he had linked all the tales together. Had he waylaid Pan and killed him, as he had killed old Van Dorn? Who was the Old Man of the North, and who was Lynne? Would he ever know? The North has swallowed many a man of whom no subsequent trace has come to light. Individuals and even whole parties have started for some isolated spot or another and failed to arrive. After a while their names are added to the long roll of the missing. Sometimes—not often, but in a sufficient number of instances to keep hope alive in the breasts of those who have lost loved ones in the North—one or another of those missing ones returns to the haunts of men after a span of years. Such was the case of Eric Thorne, found alive on the Carcajou when he had been listed as dead for five long years. And there was Borgen-son, who had traversed two thousand miles of interior

waterways and attained the Arctic coast in a clumsy scow containing a hundred dollars worth of trade goods. Hoisting a sail on his little craft he had disappeared among the ice floes of the uncharted Arctic seas. Some fifteen years thereafter the Moccasin Telegraph had buzzed with the rumor that a white chief ruled over a tribe of Eskimos far to the north and east. It was now a matter of definite knowledge that Borgenson was the man.

Almost half a century in the past, Judge Kilrain, wealthy, intelligent, a linguist of exceptional ability and a well-known figure in world affairs, apparently endowed with everything that a mortal might desire, had dropped from sight as unexpectedly and completely as if he had vanished into thin air. Many years later a party of explorers penetrating to the edge of the Barren Grounds north and east of the Great Slave Lake, reported that a man had risen from a depression before them and pointed back to the south, as if urging them to turn back. He spoke no word but suddenly turned and disappeared. Two of the party swore that this man was Kilrain. Harrington knew of a dozen such reappearances. Were there, somewhere out in the world, relatives who still hoped against hope that a tiny girl, now grown to womanhood, would come back to them? Others who hoped for the return of the Old Man of the North?

This train of peaceful speculation was rudely shattered and Harrington was brought to his feet by an ominous rumble that rose above the thunder of

the falls, a sound that increased in volume and terminated in a booming crash that shook the cabin on its foundations, while padded echoes scurried from wall to wall. Outside the huskies raised their voices in the dismal chorus of the North. Harrington knew that rumbling sound.

"Avalanche!" he exclaimed, assailed by a swift fear for Lynne's safety; for he also knew the devastation wrought by slides. He had seen clear-cut swathes on timbered slopes where the forest had been shorn to the last stick as so much grass before a mower, the splintered trunks piled in vast tangled heaps of *débris* in the bottoms. He had seen mining towns crushed and buried. Lifting his voice, he shouted Lynne's name again and again. When she did not answer he donned his furs and started off down the floor of the sink hole. Reaching the crevice, he entered it and traversed the greater part of its length before reaching the near end of the slide. The narrow defile was blocked by snow that packed it from wall to wall to a height of two hundred feet. He was fairly sick with terror at the thought that Lynne's lovely body might be crushed somewhere in that mass. He was weak and nauseated, ready almost to tear at the snow with futile hands when Lynne came racing swiftly to him from the rear, a bit breathless from her long run.

"God!" he breathed, still further weakened, curiously enough, from the sudden revulsion of feeling

occasioned by his relief at the sight of her, the sound of her voice. "I thought you might be under it."

"No. I was at the far end of the basin," she explained. "A bad slide."

Harrington rendered opinion that once the mass had become settled and packed they could cross over it and climb down the far side with ease.

"Except for one thing," Lynne amended. "The far end fills the defile clear to the river. All of it that protrudes beyond the walls will cave in, falling into the stream, and you'll find the far end a sheer drop of a hundred feet to the river. It always happens that way when we have a slide at this point."

"You've had them before?" he queried.

"Yes, a few. Now we're imprisoned here for the winter," she predicted.

"Not that, I imagine, just when we have the snow and the traveling weather we've been wishing for," he said. "We'll make it out all right, in a week or two."

He knew that it would be no particular feat for him to get out of the sink hole but again he was conscious of a little lurking imp of elation over the fact that he might still find an excuse for lingering on here for a few more days. Was he looking for excuses to delay their start? Was it his procrastination that accounted for the fact that they were still here? In the early summer, after McNair had booted him over the cliff and the canoe had been wrecked, he had assented readily enough to Lynne's

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suggestion that it would be almost impossible to travel down to Liard on foot, crossing all the muskegs. He had known, of course, that they could make it, and that he should have insisted upon taking her to Father Ruvierre forthwith. He could travel in any country, summer or winter, in drought or in flood. But nevertheless he had assented. Even when he had been led down to the river and had seen the two little canoes that were used for conveyance between the ledge and the mouth of the defile, and when Lynne had pronounced it impossible to reach the top of the canyon with one by way of those steep and narrow fissures, he had agreed. He knew, too, that he could have packed one to the top and down over the miles to canoeing water almost as easily as he could have worn his hat for that distance. What were big hulking shoulders such as his good for, if not for such service? But he had lingered on. There had never been a time, even when McNair and his evil companion had lurked outside, when Harrington had had any real doubt but that he and Lynne could reach the Liard safely. Yet he had stayed on under the most flimsy pretexts.

It had all come about through his infernal reflections about the deficiencies of civilized modes of life, he decided. Civilization was headed somewhere, no doubt, but it certainly was headed directly away from the goal of peace and tranquillity for the individual. That being true, and since his own aim was the desire to find peace and serenity of spirit,

just what good was civilization to him? Perhaps, he thought, he was just too indolent to strive further for material progress. Well, just what goal was there toward which it would benefit him to strive? Already he had toiled hugely and had attained all the material success that he desired, and the recognition of his fellow men. More of either, and the responsibilities entailed would simply bore him. And in the end he found that he had harvested only discontent. Knowing this, why was it not his privilege to seek content along any path that opened invitingly before him? Or perhaps—but what did another perhaps, or a dozen of them, really matter? What difference would it make if he did determine just what it was that had occasioned his present outlook on life or the source of his new-born beliefs? But what did matter vitally was that he had no right to make Lynne a party to his own efforts to attain lazy self-satisfaction by depriving her of immediate opportunity to sample the civilization which she had never experienced—and of which he had experienced so much that he was ready to discard it. It just wouldn't do. He made a firm decision that he would work his way out of the basin so they could start at once—that is, in a few days now.

Back again in the cabin before the fire, Harrington felt that that shining quality about Lynne had become suddenly intensified. Or perhaps he imagined it, that it was a natural consequence of reaction from his fear for her upon hearing the ava-

lanche descend. A dozen times she laughed with that low crooning note to which his whole being responded with a curious delight as positive as if roused by a caressing hand. Even her silences seemed electric, as if masking an odd pleased excitement. Their glances met and locked and Harrington felt some way that to avert his gaze would require a physical effort greater than any of which he was capable. Lynne rose and moved slowly toward him, treading the path of his illumined gaze as if traveling the sunlit trail to paradise. Then she was in his arms, her soft body pressed to him, her fragrant lips crushed against his own. In some queer way that first touch of her lips brought with it the thought of ripe fruit and carried his mind back over the years to the day when his horse had broken a leg and left him, waterless and afoot, in the desert. Three days later a wandering prospector had found him, forced open his parched lips and poured into his mouth a few drops of water heavily laden with the juice of some honey-sweet fruit. As the first drops trickled to the base of his tongue, that poignant sweetness had seemed to spread to his every cell in a tide of ecstasy. Lynne's lips were like that, created that same ecstatic current. He had been starving for them, he knew, but had put the thought away from him. Now he took his fill of them, blindly, hungrily—feast after famine.

"Lovely," he whispered, caressing her. "Lovely," She yielded to him with fierce unrestraint and the

lips pressed against his own answered with a little crooning moan of delight. Then, suddenly, he put her away from him, almost savagely. "Lynne, we can't do this."

For a space she was silent, startled at this abrupt exile from paradise. But suddenly she was devoid of all apprehension. His very fierceness had conveyed to her woman's instinct all that she desired to know.

"Why?" she asked, and her voice was low-pitched and husky. "Don't you like it?"

"What a question!" he flared irritably, as if tried beyond his powers of restraint. "Too well!"

"So I do," she testified unevenly. "Oh! I didn't know that there could be anything in the world so lovely. Please!" She moved to him. "Just for a while longer."

Again he was holding her.

"But Lynne—you don't know!" he said.

"Oh, yes. I know," she breathed.

"But you can't!" he insisted roughly.

"Then you tell me. Teach me. But don't put me away. I want to stay here always." Her hands explored his face, drew it to her own while her lips tempted him.

Presently she drew back her head and gazed into his face, her eyes wide with an amazing conviction that had come to her.

"You love me!" she announced. "You do! I know it."

"Of course I do, you lovely little devil," he agreed. "The man doesn't live who wouldn't be mad about you at first sight. For months it's been almost impossible to keep my hands off you. I've tried not even to think about it."

She gave a delicious low chuckle, broken by the raggedness of her breathing, as she clung to him.

"And I didn't know! Why didn't you tell me? I've had a perfectly devilish time to keep myself from creeping into your arms every second. To think how much time we've wasted out of one short lifetime, when we might have been—like this!"

Hours flew by and seemed but minutes as she sat there on his knees, cradled in his arms while they recited the things that have seemed original to all lovers since the dawn of man. Eventually she sat erect and asked, "But why did you try to keep from touching me, from loving me this way, when you wanted to so much?"

"You were here alone with me," he explained.

"But surely!" she agreed, surprised.

"Living here with you alone this way," he amplified. "God knows I'm no Puritan by any stretch of imagination. But there is a strain of decency in me that wouldn't permit of my doing anything that would harm you in the eyes of people that you will meet outside."

She nestled back in his arms again and held up her lips in invitation. "But this doesn't harm me. It's just what I want," she insisted. "It was your

not touching me that was doing the harm. Now everything's all right."

Lynne was no economist in matters of love. Neither was she hampered by traditions which prescribed that the woman must not woo but instead must wait meekly for the man to take the initiative in demonstrativeness. Throughout the next few days she lavished her affection upon the mate of her choice with the complete unreserve of some entrancing wild creature.

Harrington, completely mad about her, nevertheless made tentative efforts to put a check upon his own demonstrativeness and on several occasions he declared emphatically, "We must be getting out of here, Lovely. You don't know what it's all leading to."

To which Lynne made invariable reply, "But I don't want to get out of here. I wish to stay—and I don't care two straws what it's all leading to."

On occasion Pan had brought in new dogs, some of them separated from masters whom they loved, others that had been subjected to mistreatment that caused them to be savagely distrustful. All of them had been transplanted into strange environment and company, great wolfish creatures that were shy and wild and eager to depart for the homeland that called to them. Always such new arrivals had been given into Lynne's care and she had won their trust and affection by giving to them of her own. When some great wolf dog, longing for his former master

or for the scenes of his beloved homeland, evidenced a fresh access of restlessness and desire to leave, Lynne won him back by fresh evidence of her love for him. On such occasions she addressed the restless one in those crooning tones that convey to all creatures of either canine or human extraction—even though the words may be uttered in an alien tongue that is unintelligible to the ear—that they are love-notes speaking to the spirit. And she persuaded the flesh of such a one by fondling him. And now, knowing that Harrington could not depart for the homeland that was calling to him, she sat about winning him in this same manner—the only way she knew. Day after day she inserted her entrancing person into his arms and lovingly insisted that he must stay on here with her. Every instinct of her womanhood told her that all this was as it should be, most delightful and not in the least harmful. Deep down within her she retained that firm conviction. That Harrington should feel that they must leave—and in the same breath announce that if only his own inclinations were to be consulted he would elect to stay on here forever—was to Lynne a contradictory and incomprehensible viewpoint. In her mind they themselves were all that mattered, all other considerations being negligible.

Harrington, planning to discard civilization and become a man of the wilderness, nevertheless had been subjected to the pressure of civilized taboos,

knew their weight, and was now unable to disregard the edicts of the society in which he had been reared. Adoring Lynne, he could not let her in for the verdict which that society would render in her case when he should return with her to the outside world if first he had lived here with her in violation of its taboos.

"I must take you to some trading post," he insisted. "In lieu of a missionary's being stationed there, the post factor can officiate, I believe."

To Lynne this whole idea seemed utterly absurd. What possible difference could it effect in their natures or in their love for one another to have a few ritualistic words uttered over them by a stranger? "There are so many scores of entirely different sets of beliefs and customs, that it does not stand to reason that any one can be quite right and the rest all hideously wrong," she sagely observed. "In any event if we subscribe to one, we automatically violate the rest. It some way seems too utterly absurd."

Thus Lynne, as some pagan goddess, viewing from afar the affairs of men, shrugged the lot of them into the discard, casually dismissing the whole matter.

"But you cannot dispose of all civilization and its works in so casual a fashion," Harrington laughed. "It isn't done."

"Why not? Whose affair is it, other than our own? What do all those others matter?"

"Suppose we confess that we think that they do

not matter," he conceded. "We may convince ourselves of the truth of our assumption, but we'll never convince them. They will still contend that they do matter greatly. By and large, I agree with you, but specifically one must face things as they are instead of as he would have them. There are many taboos and customs that are idiotic in the light of reason. Still, in any society whose group interests must be paramount to the wishes of the individual, some method must be devised to regulate all things, great or small. Naturally many such devisements are stupid. However, the degree to which any taboo is observed has always rested largely upon the inflexibility of the interpretation placed upon it by the group majority. One person, having been denied a certain privilege himself and without courage to transgress, is the first to jealously insist upon the punishment of some other who may have put a somewhat more lenient interpretation upon the restrictions surrounding that certain privilege. Those who are too cautious to transgress are always vastly in the majority and as a consequence cry out with mass clamor against the transgressor. That makes for inflexibility.

"On the other hand, if the example of the few who interpret a given restriction leniently were to be emulated by the many, it would mark the beginning of the end for that particular taboo through increasing public nonobservance. That's what has been happening throughout the centuries of the

climb of man, resulting in the gradual discarding of a thousand and one taboos and obsolete beliefs that have been replaced by others. Nevertheless, for one's own comfort he must, outwardly at least, observe the current taboos of the group with which his lot in life is thrown."

Lynne conceded the logic of this but it all seemed so far away that her interest in it was wholly impersonal. Meanwhile Clay was very near and her interest in him was extremely personal. So with a shrug of her pretty shoulders she consigned all of the affairs of men to the discard so far as they concerned herself.

CHAPTER XIII

THIS sincere belief in her ability to prescribe for herself and her utter disbelief in any one of the various prevailing mass convictions to which the bulk of mankind throughout the world subscribed, intrigued Harrington. Isolation ordinarily occasioned extreme narrowness and superstitions of the most fantastic sort instead of fostering enlightenment and the free play of unbiased intelligence.

"No doubt," Lynne conceded when he commented upon that point. "But the isolation of which you speak is group isolation, the segregation of small tribal cliques, is it not? Then the expanding mind of any individual in such an environment is not free to form its own convictions. On the contrary it receives its impressions from those about it and therefore has only the convictions of relatively few and vastly ignorant individuals from which to derive ideas. In addition to that, the beliefs are rigidly enforced upon each individual. My isolation has been the exact opposite of that. Through books I had access to the products that have emanated from the best minds throughout the ages, regardless of the race or religion of the individual who

gave birth to such thoughts. I studied them in not too large doses of any one at a time, but rather in variety, so that I could compare and form my own convictions from contrasting them. And I was left absolutely free to pass upon them myself, not from the prejudiced standpoint of one particular group belief. The convictions of an individual member of such a group are not his own conclusions, even though he may believe that they are, but instead are ready-made mental formulas in which he must not only believe but which he dare not question."

"That is quite true," Harrington admitted. "But it seems that you must have absorbed the viewpoint of only one man, although from the fact that he was a brilliant scholar you also received through him the products derived from great minds throughout the ages. Pan, at least, must have been somewhat of an agnostic and you absorbed his ideas to a greater extent than you realize."

"On the contrary," she dissented. "Never once did Pan relate his own convictions to me. To this day I do not know what he believed along most lines. Instead he encouraged me to relate to him such convictions as I formed for myself from comparative study of any given subject. He wrote it down as I recited it, being very careful to get it exactly in my own words. When I asked him why he did not merely take the substance of the idea instead of every word that I uttered, he said that it was almost impossible for one human to condense another's spoken or even

written thoughts without unconsciously briefing them according to his own convictions along such line. His interpretation as to what such thoughts meant necessarily would be tinged by his own beliefs. In that event, he insisted, the resulting product would be of small benefit to mankind. Instead he intended that such thoughts should be set down with absolute accuracy so that future students would be privileged to place their own interpretation upon the matter in its original form. As an example, he cited me to the works of philosophers and the utterances of prophets of the great religions, as nearly as we know them in original form, then pointed out the vastly distorted and widely varying interpretations placed upon them by others at a later date—and even the various interpretations of contemporaries.”

It came to Harrington's mind that Lynne was an experiment, probably the only one of the kind that the world had known. Pan, having explored the world's treasure house of human thought as it reposed between the covers of books, having viewed the practical results of such thoughts as they were applied by mankind in civilizations of past and present, had inevitably observed the over-lapping of ideas and the scarcity of original departure in thought. One man, using as a basis for his conclusions the expounded theory of some other which he accepted as fact, elaborated somewhat on the same ideas, which, therefore, were unoriginal and

usually tinctured with the prevailing beliefs and customs of his own time and race. Pan, then, had hit upon the novel experiment of eliciting ideas from a mind that had expanded without restrictions. Lynne had no preconceived ideas that had been implanted in her mind by others, she had no superstitions, no religion, no racial hatreds, no patriotism, no material ambitions—none, in fact, of the great determining influences that bias the individual flow of thought. And the results of that experiment, unique in the annals of the human race, were buried a hundred feet beneath that pile of rotting logs and débris that had swamped the cabin when the avalanche descended. In comparison, the riches represented by those unexcellèd gold deposits paled into insignificance. Yet those compilations were gone.

“Along what lines did he particularly encourage your interest and study, Lynne?” he asked.

“Metaphysical—philosophy and religion,” she said. “And, of course, the mysteries of Nature, for without a foundation of the working of natural forces and the physical laws of Nature upon which to build, such mental speculations would be mere footless imaginings and would probably be no more than impossible fantasies. To be worth anything whatever such conclusions must be firmly grounded upon Nature. Otherwise they would be as negligible as so many of the other beliefs which are mere fantasies that not only fail to take natural laws into

consideration but frequently run contrary to them in an attempt to set up mental barriers to irresistible forces; and as a consequence the energy of the individuals who subscribe to them are so largely expended in their efforts to strive against such forces that they have but little left to devote to progress. And progress may be effected only by working with those forces, not in opposition to them; towards their intelligent control, not by blind insistence that they do not exist. So it was along such lines that my interest has centered. As to the physical sciences, we did not have the materials, laboratory equipment and other facilities for making practical application and actual experiment. Besides, science advances only by accord with natural laws and the practical application of them, the incorporation of new elements and combinations as they are discovered. Mathematics, therefore, and chemistry, improved methods of manufacturing and agriculture, development of power and the harnessing of natural forces to create energy for the benefit of mankind, are all exact sciences, or at least based upon material experiment. Thought is not an exact science, though the understanding and application of exact sciences are the children of thought. So it was only in the realm of empiricism that I was able to indulge here, lacking the facilities for physical scientific experiment. And always, of course, I had the basis of the handbook of Nature upon which to build."

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Harrington, loving the physical woman of her to distraction, entranced by the unique revelations of her mind, was handicapped in his efforts to consider her in the light of a detached mentality, the like of which had never before existed in the annals of the human race. Necessarily, he must gauge her by other humans that he had known, by conventional standards and beliefs with which his own mind was impregnated. This, in the very nature of things, was an impossibility. But although he could not regard her as a detached mentality, he was curious nevertheless, as to what beliefs she might have formed.

"Then you have no religion, Lynne?" he asked.

"But of course I have!" she protested. "It is only in the power for analytical reasoning and the application of it to physical things that man differs from the other creatures of the earth. Therefore, the greater his fund of knowledge and his application of it, the farther he removes himself from the beasts."

"True," Harrington conceded. "But isn't that the accepted underlying principle of all present beliefs?"

"No. Rather the reverse of that. The greater part of beliefs, past and present, have been metaphysical structures whose bases rested upon the insistence that to question them was the most heinous offense, maintained through the forced acceptance of the ready-made thought as fact. A premium was

thus put upon the smothering of individual thinking rather than upon the exercise of it. Human thought, therefore, has evolved but slowly, and with many setbacks; much of it lost, and the ground regained only after centuries of struggle. It was by competition with, not by aid of, this obscuring maze of deliberate stifling of free intelligence that thought has struggled toward the truth. Various beliefs that calmly appropriate to themselves the credit for all human advancement have in reality operated as the most seriously retarding influences. Throughout the rise of man the individual of superior intelligence who evolved some truth that was destined to operate as a boon to the human race was martyred if that truth seemed at variance with the prevailing enforced beliefs of the period. Thus, even if the germ of a new discovery did not die with the individual, its beneficial application was retarded, perhaps for centuries. I could cite literally hundreds of examples. It is a rule, in fact, for the germ of a new idea to be met by opposing and unintelligent clamor against the individual who has evolved it. The one man in a million with a distinct departure in thought to offer to mankind has ever been assailed by the mass as a traitor to this or that prevailing mode of thought. Yet it is only by the mental labors of this one individual in a million that advancement in thought has lifted man higher and higher above the realm of the beasts."

"And how would you go about to remedy this for the world?" Harrington inquired.

"I cannot remedy it for the world," Lynne said. "But I can and have remedied it for myself."

"And what is your personal solution?" he persisted.

"To cling to such truths as I have already found and to search for more true knowledge," she said.

"But how can you know that your beliefs are all true when things that others have believed to be the truth appear to you as fallacies?" he insisted.

"I cannot," she conceded. "But at least I can discard such things as are manifestly untruths. That leaves my mind free from opposition to the entrance of such things as I believe to be truths. And when some thought has served me as a truth and I later discover something that disapproves it, I shall gladly discard the old for the new, not fight to retain an obsolete conviction as a truth, and thus my mind will have benefited from the acquirement of one more bit that is accurate knowledge, or at least is that much nearer to the truth than the previous belief."

"I see. But just how do you look upon that as a personal solution, or as a religion?" he questioned.

"Why, it is a religion!" she said. "We know that when we leave this mortal sphere we leave our mortal bodies behind. The only part of us that may retain individuality after death is the individuality of the mind—which is thought. Unless we

believe in reincarnation, then, the future must be that of pure reason—and the only purpose of reason is to lead the mind toward the truth. A mind that emerges into that world of intellect equipped with but one truth and no fantasies is better prepared to face it than a mind that is equipped with many fallacies and a few truths. Every bit of truth, no matter how tiny, advances the mind just that much nearer to the complete comprehension of the divine knowledge that rules the universe. And the mind that fights away a single shred of truth in order to retain a host of fantasies is retarding its advancement by just that much.”

“An evolution of intelligence, then, is the substance of your solution,” Harrington diagnosed.

“Again, it must be, unless we subscribe to reincarnation,” she agreed. “As I said, physical sciences tend to be exact while thought, mortal thought, at least, is not. But the comprehension and application of exact sciences are the children of thought. When thought becomes an exact science, then the individual who has attained to that estate is akin to the all-comprehending intelligence or force that regulates the universe. It is toward exactness in thought that the individual must strive if he will increase his intelligence toward the ultimate goal.”

“And what is your conception of that all-comprehending intelligence?” he asked curiously. “What is your vizualization of Deity?”

“I have no such vizualization,” she returned. “It

is so immense and so far beyond the power of human comprehension to conceive that I do not even try. My mind would only become cluttered with futile fantasies. We are not yet prepared to conceive it. Therefore all such present human conceptions must be sheer mental fabrication, the wish being father of the thought, instead of the thought being the offspring of a fact—fantasy against truth. The best to which any mortal may aspire is to equip his mind with as much accurate knowledge and to strip it of as many fallacies as possible while it inhabits his mortal frame.”

“Then your conception of Deity is not the personal one,” he said.

“If you mean regarding Deity as an individual, it is inconceivable to me in the guise in which it is portrayed by any one of the numerous beliefs that I have studied,” she said. “There are perfectly marvellous revelations of intelligence portrayed in the interwoven balance of Nature, in the sources and development of life. One could occupy a lifetime in the study of Nature as manifested all round about him every day. Then when he regards the stars, speculates upon the incomprehensible vastness of the universe, the billions of miles, the billions of stars, many of which are so tremendous that our earth is but a speck of dust in comparsion, it is incredible that any mortal could believe that it was all created in order to punish him if he should eat a certain thing on a certain day, or to condemn him if certain rites

were not performed over him in his infancy regardless of his own helplessness in the matter; to exalt him to perpetual life and understanding if he prescribed to some certain piece of ritualism or refrained from another. To imagine that the vast intelligence or power that regulates the universe could have created it for no other purpose than the trivial one of passing out rewards to, or wreaking vengeance upon an individual of the human race on the grounds of his daily conduct is certainly an incredibly paltry line of reasoning—an insult to the divine intelligence. In case one did believe that immortality hinged upon such trivial issues, just how could he go about it to assure his own salvation by selecting the one true belief from among the numerous others that he must automatically condemn as fallacies. There is probably not one human in a million whose beliefs are actually his own convictions, though he assumes that they are. On the contrary, his beliefs are purely a matter of chance, according to the group belief into which he happened to be born. If we admit that to be true, then we automatically credit the divine intelligence with leaving the salvation or condemnation of its creatures to chance while at the same time crediting that same intelligence with an intimate personal supervision of every daily act and thought of every creature. Take my own case, for example. I did not chance to be born into any particular belief and my environment did not impose a set of ready-made

convictions upon my mind. Necessarily I must form my own. The thing that is right in one belief, claiming its origin from divine revelation, is extremely wrong in another belief that lays claim to originating from that same source of divine revelation. I have no help in deciding which is true. Can I accuse the supreme intelligence of having so paltry a purpose in creating the universe as to pass judgment and mete out reward or punishment, salvation or condemnation to me for making a wrong choice in my effort to decide the right? Incredibly stupid that I should even consider such an insult. Unthinkably absurd!"

Thus Lynne, a detached intelligence residing in a body as lovely as the ancients' conception of their goddesses, sat here in her wilderness and passed upon the faulty theological reckonings of the teeming millions of her fellow mortals whom she had never seen—whom she knew only by the products of their minds as conveyed to her by means of their printed thought.

"All present human conceptions of Deity and of paradises of the hereafter are based on ancient legends and groups of fables," she asserted. "And none of them retain for long their original meanings. Take for example the Christian religion in which you were raised. For over a thousand years it subscribed to the Ptolemaic theory of astronomy—that the earth was a stationary body round which the rest of the universe revolved. When Galileo

subscribed to the theory of Copernicus, that the earth itself revolved round the sun, he was tortured and martyred in the belief that if his theory proved correct it would wreck the foundation of Christianity. Present-day astronomy affirms his theories, so his martyrdom served only to retard for centuries the application of the knowledge he was endeavoring to bestow upon humanity. Christianity has now accepted the new astronomy that revised man's conception of the whole universe. Geology has demonstrated that the earth was long in forming, which rendered necessary an allegorical interpretation of the fable of its creation in seven days. It is now conceded that the legend meant that it was created in seven periods, each of perhaps a million or more years in duration. Oddly enough, it disturbed the Christian religion so little that its companion legend, 'On the seventh day thou shalt rest,' is still based upon mortal reckoning of time and upheld by observance of the Sabbath every seventh day. It was the first great labor law. Now many denominations are ceasing to preach a literal hell, but an allegorical one, if any. The tale of Jonah and the whale is now largely conceded to have referred to that gentleman's entrance and subsequent expulsion from a city whose corporate limits were roughly fish-shaped. Each one of them has been savagely resisted by ecclesiasticism as an innovation that would wreck religion. Instead, each added one more to the series of retractions and adoptions by

means of the allegorical alibi. Those are all relatively modern alterations. It is doubtful if even the most reactionary ecclesiastic would go before the delegates of some national livestock association and advise that in order that their flocks should conceive, multiply and run to certain color phases they must cut and prepare rods in certain designs and place them in the watering places so animals might gaze upon them while drinking, which was Jacob's practice. Yet ecclesiasticism continues to fight against every innovation on the grounds that it will disprove the Christian religion. At present it is fighting against the theory of evolution under that same time-tried-and-found-wanting battle cry. Definite proof of the theory of evolution would not even jar the religion that rode so jauntily through the alteration by astronomy that transformed human conception of the earth from a stationary layer cake of hell, earth and heaven to a body moving through space. That same religion didn't even quiver when geology altered its fable of the earth's creation in seven days or when common sense removes the props of a literal hell from beneath its foundations. Its proof at worst would mean only an allegorical interpretation of your Garden of Eden. With an allegorical meaning of the earth's creation, an allegorical Jonah and an allegorical hell, among scores of other similar alterations, why not an allegorical Noah's Ark and Garden of Eden as well? With Deity conceived of as disembodied spirit-intelligence

it was the spirit, not the physical frame that was created in the image of Deity, even according to your religion. Those who oppose the theory of evolution do so for the reason that while they preach of God as a disembodied spirit-intelligence they are incapable of conceiving of Him in any save the terms of man's body and the present number of his ribs. So long as it is only the spirit that goes on, what does it matter if that spirit is housed now in the body of a white priest, a Chinese coolie or a Papuan cannibal and perhaps in a frame somewhat lower in the physical scale some million of years ago? What if man's forebears had feathers or scales way back down the line? It is his spirit that goes on, not the shape of his toenails or the past or present number of his teeth. So at best its acceptance, when it comes, will necessitate only one more allegorical interpretation—that of the Garden of Eden. Even the serpent could be left coiled in the legend as symbolical of the warning that man would revert to a lower estate if he should cease to increase his store of knowledge. Your religion is now passing into the stage of diffusion of ideas rather than toward greater unity of thought. Ecclesiasticism, instead of being able to settle upon a common interpretation of the meaning of its one textbook in almost two thousand years, has divided into many camps of different ecclesiastic thought, each claiming the tollgate privileges on some different dim denomination trail to paradise instead of giving the people

one main-traveled highway to heaven paved with a common interpretation of the teachings of Christ, your prophet."

"That's true," Harrington conceded. "What with the regiments of progressive and reactionary ecclesiastic thought, the denominational battalions, the platoons of the faddist cults, and squads of the spiritualists and mystic healers, there are more trails to paradise than there are railroads to Chicago."

"And each one claiming a different spiritual formula as the only open sesame to the one route arriving at the advertised destination," she pointed out. "It works toward diffusion rather than toward unity. In view of history it would seem to be well on the way to ultimate disintegration. Perhaps in another couple of centuries its places of worship will be as obsolete as the temples of the Aztecs."

Her observations were utterly detached and dispassionate as opposed to the bitter positiveness with which most mortals advance their views on religion, the intense rivalry between two creeds over minor differences of ritual and trivial matters of observance. Harrington thought of her as a reincarnation of some pagan goddess returned to comment upon the superstitions of man. For the ancients—and most moderns as well—had been unable to conceive of Deity as pure disembodied intellect. Instead the immortals whom they worshipped occasionally dwelt in material bodies and indulged in friendships and enmities that were distinctly mortal. While en-

dowed with detached intellects that were superhuman, they nevertheless assumed fleshly guise and returned to earth to hate and injure, to love and seduce mere mortals in perfectly human manner. And Lynne, after a discussion in which her views seemed to emanate from a detached and dispassionate intellect, swiftly reverted to a human goddess intent upon weaving her spell of earthly love and passion round the mortal of her choice. He found in these discussions a source of never-ending interest and they spent many hours together before the blazing logs in the fireplace.

"Did you ever devote much thought to the probable source of origin of the various beliefs?" he inquired of Lynne one night, as she reclined on a bearskin before the fire, her head propped upon her hands as she gazed pensively into the dancing flames.

"Oh, yes," she said. "That is pure speculation, of course. But the origin of some beliefs seem to indicate that the process of reasoning by which they were evolved was occasioned by accurately observing natural phenomena but erring in the comprehension of them through substituting effect for cause. The snake-dance ceremony of the Hopi Indians is a case in point. The rainy season inundates the country and drives the snakes from their underground retreats and into the open. The rains have thus brought out the snakes, in a manner of speaking, but the primitive mind, apparently

reversed cause and effect and arrived at the conviction that the snakes brought the rain. Hence the worship of snakes by a desert people and the supplication to the snakes to bring rain. Since the rainy season is recurrent, and also simultaneous with the appearance of snakes, the people who subscribe to the belief witness an annual repetition of a perfectly natural event and so are perfectly satisfied that their reasoning has been correct; that their supplication to the snakes has been efficacious. That is more obvious than most by its very directness so I cite it as an illustration."

"Yes. The origin of the snake dance, which is strictly a prayer for rain, would be fairly obvious," he said. "How do you account for the fact that all humans, of whatever race or religion, have invariably believed in some sort of immortality, of the persistence of life after death? Do you consider that the widespread prevalence of that idea, too, is merely the case of a common wish that has fathered the thought? That as the mind of primitive man unfolded and he increased in intelligence he abhorred the thought that his own end was the same as that of unreasoning beasts and through his hope of survival he fathered the belief of an after life? Or do you consider—in view of the fact that isolated races without contact with one another hold that common conviction, regardless of their manner of expressing belief in it—that the human being was endowed with an instinctive knowledge of his heritage of survival?"

“Naturally, I cannot pretend to answer that authoritatively. However, it is of interest to me, but I have refrained from forming pronounced convictions upon such matters of which conclusive proof will remain unavailable to me in this life. But I have formed a few tentative theories, inclining toward your former supposition—the prevalence of a common origin in thought as against the idea of instinctive heritage of the knowledge. The most tenable of these is that belief in persistence of life and retention of individuality after death originated through dreams. It occurred to me one day when a favorite dog of mine slept beside me. He yelped excitedly in his sleep and his feet twitched spasmodically. I surmised that he was chasing over again in his dreams a snowshoe hare that he had pursued and killed in life or that he was at least living through a similar experience. A few days before he had snarled and showed his teeth while he slept, apparently battling with lynx or wolverine. It came to me that dreaming was the common faculty of higher animals as well as men. Then, suddenly, the solution came to my mind. A primitive man saw his father slain in battle, his wife, mother or son dead of accident or disease; he slew enemies with his own hand, killed animals in the hunt. Then he slept, and in his sleep his departed father, wife or son appeared to him and conversed upon common topics; he met again the enemies he had slain in battle, some of them, perhaps viewing him without

enmity, others falling upon him with savage menace that caused him to wake in screaming terror. He encountered again in life the animals he had slain and seen in death. What more natural than that he should come to believe in the persistence of life and individuality after death? If these beings still lived in some state of existence which was beyond his comprehension, then he naturally attributed to them even greater powers for good or harm than those with which they had been endowed in the realm of the physical in which he had known them. He would make gestures of supplication to those who might aid him, gestures of placation to those who might be disposed to do him harm. Also, in those earlier religions, animals played a greater part, evidence of the belief that the beasts, too, retained individuality after death. As dreaming is a common attribute of all humans it seemed more plausible that belief of immortality originated in dreams than that the racial instinct had been endowed with a heritage of that hope. If it had come as a race-wide heritage there also would have been greater uniformity of belief instead of the tremendous variety of rites of obeisance, supplication and placation to as many different varieties of deities. The very abundance of such differences betokens the likelihood of a common origin such as dreams, the meanings interpreted according to various tribal or racial mentalities—the objects of animal or vegetable totem of a primitive tribe, the worship of natural

phenomena and imaginary creatures, half beast, half human, by semi-civilized peoples, to the personal Deity attended by creatures half-women, half-birds, such as is the modern idea. The conception of the future existence also varies, according to the tribal or racial ideas of ultimate happiness as conceived by the particular peoples who evolved it, varying from the Happy Hunting Ground or its variant, the imaginary mecca of creature comforts of the primitives, to the more elaborate paradise or its equivalent imaginary mecca of combined physical and intellectual delight as evolved by medieval thought and persisting into modern times. Those are only theories, of course, and as a consequence I attach little significance and decline to accept them as convictions. So whether or not the origins are as I suspect matters little. The fact remains that there is little fundamental difference between the conception of the Happy Hunting Ground presided over by the Great Spirit and the layer cake of hell, earth and heaven presided over by a similarly all-powerful Deity."

"And which do you prefer?" he asked.

"Neither," she promptly announced. "I could never subscribe to any belief that fosters the bigotry responsible for precipitating such misery upon the human race over trivial differences of opinion between pygmy intelligences as to what sort of future a man must aspire to and the prescribed route by which he must attain it. I shudder to think of the

hopelessness that must assail the minds of such bigoted ecclesiastics as have been launched into eternity equipped only with such fanatical convictions and no truths. I have been anxious to enter the world of humans and see it all for myself, but perhaps it is better to remain apart from it all."

"But you are thinking of ancient and medieval beliefs and persecutions," he suggested. "Modern civilization is not at all like that."

"No?" she queried doubtfully. "Perhaps not to you, who have lived in it and view it as natural. To me, who have only studied it from detachment and without participation, there seems but very little difference. The wars, the commercial instead of physical enslavement of the weaker races by the stronger; with different gods, or even the same one, acting as commanding generals on either side, the militant aggressiveness of present-day beliefs and the continual campaign each wages for supremacy. To a detached observer the difference is not apparent. It appears merely that the substance of the beliefs have shifted a bit and that bigotry is as ready now as ever to defend such trivial differences as the bases upon which the universe rests. Otherwise why would you fear that I should be persecuted and shunned by those of your own group convictions if I should violate one of the taboos? No. I imagine that you have lived too close to it to see the striking similarity of past and present."

"But to a certain extent I agree," Harrington

said. "Human life, of course, is rendered less difficult by applied science in many lines. Man's ills and pains are alleviated by the advancement of medical science; the harnessing of energy and more modern methods of manufacturing have lightened his labors, and so on indefinitely. All of that, of course, is the result of thought along accurate lines. Theologically, of course, we are still a few centuries behind science in our thinking. Theology, in fact, is more largely emotional conviction than conviction of the mind. But the world is a better place in which to live than formerly. Even so, I have wondered at length if for me, personally, civilization was the road to contentment. It is not. This very wilderness isolation, with you, would accomplish for me what all of civilization could not."

"Then why should we not stay on here together?" she demanded instantly. She rose from before the fire and came to him swiftly.

"For the reason that I know all too well the power and unintelligent vengefulness of that bigotry which you despise in the abstract but whose weight you have never experienced," he explained. "Loving you as I do, and knowing it as I do, I would merely subscribe to its tenets in certain respects in order that you shall never feel its fury and be hurt by it."

"But how can it hurt me if I have you?" she scoffed. "I care not a straw for mass approval or its disapproval. Only for yours."

"Then why not rely upon my judgment in that

matter and go with me to some one who can perform the rites that will eliminate the possibility of rousing that bigotry, your indifference to which is merely inexperience and lack of knowledge as to its prying eagerness to inflict punishment upon violators of its taboos?" he questioned.

Her warm fresh lips answered him and she abandoned herself to the exquisite emotion of the contact. Her eyes turned misty with tenderness and passion. The Pagan Goddess, no longer a disembodied intellect, descended from Olympus as an intellect inhabiting a body of transcendent loveliness, devoted in its every fiber to delight in her mortal lover.

"What need have we of the world and swarming masses of people when we have each other?" she asked him after an interval. "What could they matter to us when we have this? I don't need them, Clay. I need just you. Why should we go outside when both of us prefer to stay on here?"

CHAPTER XIV

HARRINGTON himself viewed the thought of their return to the outside world with some apprehension. There was much to consider. Would Lynne become so thoroughly enamored of the variety that civilization affords that she would realize the deprivations of her former isolated life and come to hate the thought of it along with all that was associated with it? That contingency was highly probable. Would the fresh bloom of her naturalness be rubbed off by contact with civilized artificiality of manner? That seemed almost inevitable. Then, too, there were their own personal relations to be considered. At the present time Lynne adored him, would probably continue to admire him extravagantly for so long as they were alone together and there was no way in which she could make unfavorable comparisons. Surrounded by millions of men, would she not discover by comparison that he was not the wonderful creature that she had believed him to be? That, too, seemed an inevitable result, even though her love for him might still persist. Why should he take that chance? He should not take the chance, reason answered; never in a thousand years. Hav-

ing found what he wanted in life would he not brand himself a moron to risk the loss of it? Again reason aligned itself on his side. Still there was duty, his conscience whispered. Duty!

He gave ironical consideration to an analysis of duty as the civilized mind conceives that fearsome term. He preferred to stay on here. Reason supported his preference. Lynne not only preferred to remain here but seemed determined to do so. Her reason, also, supported her desire. Why, then, should that persistent cry of "duty, duty!" surge up to urge the necessity of an action that was contrary to the dictates both of his inclination and his reason? Lynne was troubled by no such complexity of thought. Wherein were their mental processes so different? When the mind of an infant born into civilization first begins to unfold, its elders begin forthwith to insert into it a ready-made set of convictions so as to make sure that it will later conform to the prescribed human pattern. Most of the prescriptions laid down as rules for conduct are entirely at variance with the natural inclinations of this growing mite of life. After years of more or less unintelligent schooling in repression of natural instincts and the substitution of the artificial it results logically that any human so trained comes to view inclination of any sort with active suspicion. Every natural impulse has been thwarted entirely or hedged about with taboos or mannerisms for so long a time that, unconsciously, one arrives at

the point where the very thing that he desires to do, no matter what, automatically seems to be the wrong thing to do. Thus conscience and a sense of duty seem to be in perpetual conflict with both reason and natural impulse. Harrington had heard duty defined in a hundred different ways: Be self-sacrificing; vote for Jones—vote for Smith, on the same issue; love your country before self; turn the other cheek—fight your own battles; be meek and you will inherit the earth—be martial and take up arms for the right—love your neighbor—be worthy—do your duty—always do right—oh, hell! He could go on reciting definitions of duty indefinitely, most of them vague generalities upon which one could put a wide variety of interpretations, and all of them, if linked in selected couplets, decidedly contradictory. He laid all of this before Lynne.

“But through it all is the supreme idea of self-abnegation,” he said. “That, distinctly, is the keynote of the duty symbol. The main idea seems to be to refrain from doing anything that you really wish to do, to put everything on earth—country, religion and neighbors ahead of self. If one appropriates the tail end of the race for himself he has done his duty.”

Lynne was reclining upon a bearskin before the fire. She rose and clasped her hands about her knees.

“Yes. It all resolves back upon your statement of some time ago, that all human conduct, down to

the smallest details, must be regulated to pattern in order to make life livable in crowded centers and that it must be done by taboos. The duty symbol is the basic part of the structure, I should say. With the great mass believing from infancy that subjugation of personal inclination in all things is the chief element of virtue, it makes for easy regulation of the mass of humanity by the leaders."

"Just that," Harrington agreed. "The average parents, following the dictates of leaders who rule by reason of individuality, and hoping that their offspring will develop those same qualities of leadership, nevertheless put in their time in impressing upon the unfolding mentalities the very formulas that tend to crush all individuality and to shape them into so many human patterns of conforming duty-mites, ready to obey the dictates of any call save that of their own natural inclinations. With the mass thus controlled by the duty complex the leaders have but to lift their voices and announce the nature of the duty to be performed—to espouse some cause and to fight for it, to espouse some cause and prepare resignedly to bear its defeat, to give of material resources, to curse, to pray or what-not—and the mass mind accepts it as duty and performs it valiantly at the sacrifice of self, even to sacrifice of life, when actually the individual inclinations of all concerned are opposed to the movement of the hour. But how those taboos do cling." He laughed down at Lynne. "I'm an integral part of that mass

duty-complex of civilized humanity. Now here am I longing to stay on here with you. Reason and natural inclination urge that course. Yet there is that damned little interfering voice forever whining in my ears that it is my duty to you to take you into the outside world."

"It would seem to me that duty should follow the dictates of natural inclination supported by reason," said Lynne reflectively. "But reason and inclination urge that I keep you here. That is why I planned it."

"You planned it?" Harrington echoed.

"Of course," she confessed calmly. "When I told you last spring that it would be impossible to cross the big swamps between here and the Liard on foot I knew that it would be easy for me." Harrington knew it too. She could have traversed that country as easily as a wild thing. When tired of land travel she would take to the water as readily as an otter. He could picture her swimming tirelessly, hour after hour across some lake or down the course of a stream. "Or I could have made a birch-bark canoe, or a boat of green moose hide stretched on a willow frame," she resumed. When she reached the point of informing him that the snowslide came down every winter to block the defile, Harrington laughed aloud. He had imagined that the various delays had been occasioned by his own temporizing, and he had experienced a guilty feeling that he was catering to self-inclination in lingering instead of following

the clear call of duty and starting on the journey to Father Ruvierre in spite of obstacles. And now to find that Lynne had planned it deliberately from the first!

"This is too good!" he chuckled. "Trapped! A prisoner of love to a beautiful Amazon. Held in bondage by silken cords of dear delight! Lovely, if only you realized how good this really is. But tell me, sweet, just why you so suddenly decided to keep me a prisoner of love here rather than to go outside with me and love me there."

Lynne rose from the bearskin and transferred her entrancing person to his arms.

"Because I would not let you go to her," she said.

"Me! Go to her! Go to whom?" he queried.

"That's a bit too deep for me, Lovely. Elucidate."

"That other woman," she stated.

"But there's no other woman for me to go to, Lynne," he said. "None but yourself in the whole creation that matters a straw to me. Just you!"

"Um," Lynne murmured doubtfully, kissing him. "What about that girl in the story?"

"The story! What story?" Harrington demanded vaguely.

She told him.

"Oh!" he said, his mind groping back. He remembered now. "Oh, that!" Also his mind wandered back to the woman who had obsessed his thoughts for so long a time. It all seemed so long ago—a part of a different state of existence. Mean-

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ingless now. Odd how it had depressed him at the time. "Oh, that," he echoed again. "Yes, I recall now." He tried to visualize that other face, and with an effort he recalled it to his mental projecting room and flashed it on the screen of his mind. A beautiful face, and a fine one, something like Lynne's—just a bit; but lacking that shining quality that was Lynne's. "So you thought the girl in the story was the one that I wanted?"

"I knew it," Lynne concurred, a queer intensity in her eyes.

"But why? You'd never seen the girl. I suppose," he teased, "it was because you recognized in me the perfect character to be cast in the part of the Blundering Fool in that particular fairy tale? Confess, now."

But Lynne was unable to compete with him on a basis of tender raillery. It was without the bounds of her experience.

"It was no fairy tale—and I told you it was the woman who was the fool," she said gravely. "But I knew that if you were to see her again, you might be the one."

"Bull's eye," he said ruefully. "But Lynne, I've scarcely thought of her in months."

"I believe that," she returned thoughtfully. "But I want you to stay here until I am quite sure that you will never think of her again. Now love me," and she slid into his arms and held up her lips in invitation. He watched the light in her eyes fade

to a glow of swooning tenderness before she closed them; and he touched the lids gently with his lips as if to seal and preserve that look in them for all time to come.

During the course of the next few days Harrington was amusedly conscious of the fact that he was actually a captive. A tractable captive, to be sure, a prisoner chained by the tender fetters of love but a prisoner nevertheless. He adored the thought of being the object of it. What other woman in the world, even desiring it, would have been able to conceive and carry through such a plan? But he wished to dispel the apprehension that was behind the fancied necessity of the act, so he explained to Lynne that upon their entrance into the outside world it was extremely remote possibility that he should meet that other woman who constituted the basis of her determination to remain here; that she might be thousands of miles removed from them for years on end and that even in case of their sojourning for a space in the same city the likelihood of their meetings was very slim. But Lynne could not quite visualize the immensity of that other world. In the very forefront of it, whether trading post or city, she pictured the specter of that other woman waiting with outstretched arms to deprive her of her mate. Therefore she kept him here. Harrington waged a losing battle since he fought also against his own inclination. After all, he thought, it was isolation that had made of Lynne the loveliest and

most unusual creature of his experience. Why not dedicate her to the wilderness that had produced her? His uneasy sense of guilt at keeping her here away from civilization would not bear inspection in the light of reason. One could scarcely be deprived of what one had never experienced, so she would feel no actual sense of loss at not visiting the world of civilization. Her happiness in staying on here with him was assured, as was his own; while the happiness of both of them would be in constant jeopardy from the instant they entered the outside world. The feeling that he must take her to Ruvierre, then, to determine what the priest had in store for her future, was probably a perverted sense of that duty-complex which they had discussed—far more likely to work out detrimentally than for the best.

Lynne drew him to her on the big padded couch before the fire and gave him unstintedly of her love and caresses, wearing down his resistance until he was ready to capitulate. His insistence that they leave as soon as possible and visit some missionary he explained on the same grounds as formerly—the necessity of conforming to certain man-made conventions lest their nonobservance should cause her unpleasantness upon her entrance into the world of men. And, as before, she shrugged aside all man-made rites, rituals and taboos as negligible considerations when applied to herself.

However, she clearly recognized the fact that there are mental hazards, barriers of the mind that are not

to be hurdled or transgressed with impunity. She had painstakingly planted in the brain of many a savage husky certain taboos that were observed thereafter far more scrupulously than would have been the case if only physical coercion had been applied. These things were true of men in a far greater degree. There were certain basic principles that Pan had implanted in her mind at an early age. They had become a very part of her and it would have been foreign to her nature to transgress them. And if this wish of Clay's, to have some third party sanction their staying on together, would serve as a mental hazard that would bind him to her irrevocably, then she was decidedly in favor of it, willing to submit to any sort of ceremonial rite performed by any one he should chose from a trading-post factor to a voodoo necromancer. But not just yet. Just at present she was too greatly delighted with the existing state of affairs to be willing to risk distributing them. Some other time would do for that sort of thing.

As time progressed she devoted even more thought to that side of the matter. She must devise some means by which she could bind Clay to her beyond recall before they entered that great outside. She pondered for long. Clay, she knew, felt it necessary that they should have some sort of ceremony performed. He viewed it as very binding—a mental hazard that he would not lightly overstep. How could she bring it to pass? Dropping to sleep one

night with that problem still uppermost in her mind, she waked suddenly with the full solution. Her subconsciousness had worked out the equation.

Rising quickly, she repaired to the living room and stirred up the fire, adding two fresh logs. She stood there for a space of minutes, her eyes shining as she gazed into the mounting flames. Then she summoned Harrington and he joined her before the fire.

"Listen, Clay. I have been thinking," she announced. "There are so many different marriage customs among various peoples—fifty that I could recite offhand. And you tell me that even among those of your belief there are various persons—religious, official, judicial and so on—who are authorized to perform this very binding ceremony. I know that among other peoples chiefs of tribes, headmen of villages, medicine men, military dictators, captains of ships at sea, royal personages and rulers of provinces can perform those rites."

"Yes, Lovely," he said.

"I'm the ruler of this region. It is mine. Pan bequeathed it to me—my heritage from the Old Man of the North. So I have devised a ceremony of my own."

"It would be binding upon me for all time to come," he conceded.

"Then do you mind, Clay?" she crooned.

"No, my dear. I'd love it," he said.

She drew him out into the night and held out her

arms to the flaring streamers of the Northern Lights that played across the skies.

"Before the Great Spirit of the red men and the God of the whites, before the deities and prophets of all peoples, yellow or black, before the powers that swing the sun, moon and stars in their orbits, before the stern spirits that ride the blizzards and those gentler ones that unfold the buds with the warmth of spring and bring song to the throats of birds at mating time, before the gods of all the creatures of field and woods—and before you, my Old Man of the North, who have gone somewhere on beyond, I take Clay unto myself forever and forever."

She turned and held up her face to him.

"I have taken you before all of the gods of the universe. Now we may forsake one god and turn to another, but we can never forsake or turn from each other," she said. "Kiss me. Take me now."

He held her in his arms on the great skin-covered couch before the fireplace.

Chief, suddenly overcome by the mystery of the Northern Lights, elevated his muzzle and launched his long-drawn howl to the gods of the Arctic night. A score of full-throated huskies threw the volume of their lungs into the wild chorus of the North.

"Your subjects, Lovely," Harrington whispered, "voicing their approval at the wedding of their Queen."

CHAPTER XV

LYNNE, having thus bound Harrington to her, was now willing to accede to his request that they emerge from the sink hole and travel about the country. He explained that he could tunnel the snow-blocked defile with ease, or mount it and drive a slanting tunnel from the top near the far end to the level of the river. Lynne then revealed the existence of the other route to the top.

Taking the dogs up by this route was something of a feat, but they constructed a sling of caribou hide that would fit securely round the body of a dog. At each of the three difficult points Lynne adjusted this harness on each dog in turn, while Harrington, from the ledge above, hauled the animal up with a long rawhide rope. By means of this improvised elevator, they transferred ten dogs and the sleigh to the top, thereafter leaving them in the dog corral between the first and second rims of the sink hole.

There followed glorious runs across the white landscape when they traveled far and slept in their fur sleeping bags, while the dogs curled up in the snow, each with his tender nose protected from the bitter cold by burying the member in a bushy tail.

They set snares and took the skins of mink and sables, of ermine and an occasional fox. But always the cabin and the flickering fire on the big stone hearth was best; a haven of refuge—home.

The Arctic winter still held its grip although there were increasing periods of light daily. Then came the sun, showing briefly at first, then hanging each day for a few hours above the horizon and shedding a cold brilliant light upon a frozen, snow-bound world. Spring, with its first chinooks that thawed the drifts and sent surface water boiling across the ice. Most of the snow disappeared from the open. Hardy flowers pushed through at the very edge of the remaining drifts. Skunk cabbage thrust asparagus-like shoots through the dead leaves at the foot of the alders. Tips of willow and alder swelled with life, preparatory to extending their shoots. Bull moose had shed their massive antlers and their heads were now unadorned. A few bears had come from their winter's dens and were nibbling a few blades of grass and tender new willow shoots. And still the ice had not gone out of the streams.

Then one day Lynne gazed aloft as a few silvery notes drifted down from on high. A half dozen swans reflected the rays of the sun as if they shone on burnished silver. Clamorous honking mingled with the clarion notes of the swans and a long wedge of gray geese gabbled joyously, as they pitched down from the skies and made a landing on the tundra. As if this were the signal, the gorgeous spring of the

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Northland claimed the country. The feathered hordes swept in from their mysterious migrations in countless millions. White banks of snow-geese scurried through to nest in the tundra on the shores of the Arctic Ocean. Ducks of a dozen varieties came swishing up from the south, loons and grebes appeared, warblers and flycatchers flittered through the timber, plovers and curlews dropped down from the skies. A flock of half a hundred sand-hill cranes made a landing on a little knoll some distance from Clay and Lynne and the two of them watched a strange performance. Wildly clamorous, the tall gray-plumed fellows bowed and scraped, extending long necks and curtsying, leaping upon first one foot, then the other, moving forward and back in the wildest and most expressive quadrille in all Nature—the love dance of the sand-hill cranes.

New migrants appeared daily, and still the scurrying feathered hosts rushed on. The hiss of wings filled the air of nights, and through the gabbling converse of geese and cranes an occasional clear piping notes of a homing plover or the shrill call of a curlew dropped from on high, as a distant silver bugle note cleaving through the din of battle.

But the clanging of the feathered hosts was not the music of battle. It was the music of pulsing life and love, come again to greet the spring when the ice king released his grip on the frozen North.

And Lynne and her mate revelled in the spring, as joyous and care-free as the creatures of the wild.

They traveled far and swam together in the streams that gurgled joyful release from the ice that had held them fettered for so long a time. And with the spring came Villiers, worn fine and thin at the end of a long, long journey.

He had come clear from Track's End since mid-winter, having gone outside with the boats of the traders the previous fall at the request of Ruvierre, the priest.

"Laverne is up in here somewhere and he means no good," Villiers stated, after a brief greeting.

"Have you seen him?"

"A man who called himself McNair came here on no good errand," Harrington informed. "But he is resting comfortably in the arms of the devil, so his case can wait for the present. What I wish to know first is this: Who was the Old Man of the North? How did he come to have Lynne up here? And who is Lynne?"

"Perhaps you recall hearing the tale that almost half a century ago Judge Kilrain suddenly dropped from sight and was given up as lost. Then, perhaps ten years later, a party of explorers penetrating the edge of the Barren Grounds northeast of Great Slave Lake ran into a recluse and recognized him as Judge Kilrain, though few believed it." Harrington nodded to signify that he had heard of the occurrence and Villiers resumed:

"He shifted his range far to the west and was probably the first white man to penetrate this Liard

country. He made his permanent home here at the big falls but prowled all of the tributaries of the Liard. It was forty years ago that the few scattered natives of the country began whispering of the spirit of the North that dwelt in the phantom falls. The Nahanni had never been up in this region, but held out along the main Liard. And even if they'd had the notion to come up this way later, the fear of the Old Man of the North would have halted the superstitious beggars. So much for Kilrain.

"He had been wandering the Liard country for somewhere round twenty years when one day he saw floating in a backwater eddy a small piece of white peeled log with a roll of birch bark round it, tied in place by two strips of cloth. The message sent him hurrying off upstream. If he had found it in the main Liard, he would have been forced to conjecture as to which one of a score of tributary streams it had been launched in. But at the same time of finding it, he was well up the course of a tributary river, which simplified matters. He found a little hut of logs and mud in which a woman was dying.

"Now as to her part. She came of a very wealthy eastern family and loved a young man named Lynnhaven, of considerable personal charm but who lacked material resources. The family objected to his financial rating and vetoed the match. A similar affair on the part of another sister was also blocked. Then suddenly, just after one sister had been mar-

ried to a man of the family's selection, the other disappeared. The family never heard of her again, although a sizable fortune was spent in the search for her. The bulk of her father's estate, when he died a few years ago, was left to the only child of the sister who had married according to family dictates. This child, a girl, was the only known living heir. A legacy of somewhat staggering proportions, however, was left in trust for the missing daughter or her heirs, in case she should reappear before a certain date. The father had never given up hope of her return. The fact that young Lynnhaven had disappeared also made it seem morally certain that the girl had eloped with him.

“And she had, going west to join him in the new settlements of Alberta. From there, with two Indian helpers, they started into the North by canoe. They reached a flat prairie region now known as the Hay River country. It is still largely unexplored. The streams thereabouts meander in all directions. They made a portage from the head of one stream to another, believing that the new piece of water would take them back south to the Koochigak, up which they had come in the early summer. They had one canoe and most of the equipment across when the two natives, returning for the other canoe, failed to reappear. It is likely that they had doubts as to where the stream would take them and simply deserted as the safest expedient. The young couple shoved off. After two weeks of steady traveling the man knew

what their northwest course presaged. They had crossed an almost imperceptible divide and this stream would continue to carry them into the North, and eventually into the Arctic. It was a tributary of the Liard, emptying into it from the south several hundred miles above where this stream flows into the Liard from the north. But he did not know that. Only the mouth of the Liard, where it flowed into the Mackenzie, was known to the white man at that time. An early winter swooped down and the freeze-up caught them. They were well supplied and there was an abundance of game in the hills, so they wintered through in relative comfort. The girl's baby was born in the spring. While the ice was still running after the break-up, Lynnhaven was caught in a jam, wrecked the canoe and was drowned.

"The girl was still weak. The shock and grief at losing him and the horror of her own situation weakened her still further. At last she could no longer hunt for meat. She launched messages, one of which Kilrain found. She died two days after he reached her. Kilrain started out with the infant, resorting to desperate expedients to keep it alive. The caribou were calving. He shot caribou cows and extracted the milk from their udders to keep life in the child. He crossed the main Liard and went up a tributary stream flowing in from the north that took him into the country of the Ikluts. They were shy as forest creatures and deserted their teepees and took to the bush when he ap-

proached. But he gained an interview with an ancient crone who was too decrepit to flee. He could not speak a word of her language but he made signs that were very much to the point. The old squaw hobbled away into the bush. Later she returned with an old man and a young woman who had lost her own baby two days before and she nursed the white babe. She was the daughter of a native named Klatakan and her man had died prior to her own infant's arrival. Kilrain purchased her from Klatakan to act as nurse for the white baby. That's about all of it. The Old Man of the North was Judge Kilrain, the nurse was Tanlika and the infant was Lynne, so there you are."

"So that's it," Harrington said. His mind's eye traveled back over that Northland tragedy. "I wonder how it happened that Kilrain did not inform her people. Do you know?"

"Yes," Villiers said. "He told me his reasons. He believed that every human mind was warped from birth by the superstitions, taboos, conventions and ready-made convictions foisted upon it by its elders—faulty knowledge, the most of it, yet stated as fact, the belief of which was instilled by reiteration and enforced by fear. Even a superior mind, handicapped in infancy by such training, was faced with the task of striking off the shackles of such erroneous mental processes before becoming capable of any clear and individual thinking. Thus every mind was confronted first with the task of embracing

ready-made psychology that was opposed to natural impulses as it has been manufactured and dispensed for mass consumption, then with the task of repudiating much of it before being able to rise above the level of mediocre ideas and assuming leadership in thought. He had speculated at length as to the almost limitless possibilities of a keen mind that should start off free of prejudice, superstition and preconceived ideas. What would result if such an unfolding mind, instead of being impregnated with enforced convictions, should be placed in possession of the best thinking that the great minds of all ages had been able to devise and left free to render its own unbiased verdicts? The works of philosophers of all periods of human thought, the results of scientific research in every line, the religious practices and beliefs of all peoples, the history of the rise of man, the various theories of government, all could be purveyed into that plastic mill of thought—a mind that was free to put its own interpretation upon every matter without preconceived standards by which to gauge it, without the guilty fear that the verdict would violate some long-prescribed taboo or be found contrary to prevailing modes of mass conviction. Would not the deductions of such a mind be much more direct and lucid than those formed by a mind that was fettered by superstition, racial antipathies, patriotism, religious convictions and a hundred other elements, each of which would have a voice in determining the verdict

on any given subject? Would not the tabulating of the decisions made by such a mind be a new contribution to the literature of the world? Kilrain thought that it would. So he decided to keep her here where he could provide her with the products of the best civilized minds but where she would not be exposed to civilization's corroding influences. He made the experiment and faithfully chronicled the ideas that she evolved as her mind developed. You see?"

"Yes," said Harrington. "So that is what was in those manuscripts—the complete record of a unique mind. And now those thoughts are rotting beneath a hundred feet of débris where the snow-slide engulfed the cabin—lost to the world."

"Not necessarily," Villiers dissented. "Those thoughts are still retained in the mind that formed them. Another historian could chronicle them as they come from her lips. Why not yourself?"

"But would I be able to commit all of her thoughts to paper as unreservedly as the Old Man of the North was capable of doing?" Harrington inquired doubtfully.

"No," Villiers replied frankly. "Not yet, for the reason that you have not yet cleared your own mind of the clutter of prejudice to the point that Kilrain had. Certain thoughts of hers would impress you as too startling for you to commit to paper without tempering them by your own conventional ideas, which would render them worthless

as originals. You would consider her utterances as those of an individual who was very dear to you, not as the emanations of a mind that was the only one of its kind in existence. You would have to view it from the latter angle before you would be able to put down every expression with scientific accuracy. But it would come to you as it did to Kilrain."

Harrington nodded. "He tried the experiment and the end justified the means," he said. "But I still can't quite see how he felt privileged to arrogate to himself the shaping of the destiny of a human mind—how he felt that it was his right."

"There again is illustrated the difference between your mind as it is now and Kilrain's mind when he found Lynne," Villiers smiled. "Yours is the civilized mind speaking from conventional standards. Kilrain had long since discarded civilization and standardized modes of civilized thinking—which of course meant the complete scrapping of the duty-complex. In a state of Nature duty consists, not of doing the things that you desire not to do, but the reverse. There is no self-abnegation. The duty of a wild thing toward its young, its mate, its fellows and towards other denizens of the wild rests solely upon inclinations, never upon ethical considerations that are artificial. Kilrain acted upon his natural inclinations."

"In other words, there is no such thing as a guilty conscience in a state of Nature," Harrington said. "The cat who devours her young during a

period of famine has no sense of wrongdoing. It is only when artificial ethics are set up by superior force and maintained by fear of consequences that conscience is born. You can picture that same cat, after having been chastized by man for stealing the liver, experiencing a guilty conscience—or active apprehension, as you choose to call it—upon stealing meat another time. Kilrain, having reverted to a state of Nature, had no conscience in the matter. Is that it?”

“Not quite,” Villiers negatived, smiling. “Conscience, as you say, is an artificial product, and no doubt a human infant reared alone on an uninhabited island without instruction would have no more conscience than a dicky-bird, but once conscience has come into being in an individual it never dies, though the direction of it may be altered by altering convictions as to right and wrong. Kilrain, let us say, was endowed with a conscience as active as any, but it was directed by his own individual intelligence rather than by the mass standards of the civilization that he had foresworn. Even upon ethical grounds he could have justified his act.

“We must consider first the absolute fact that the destiny of every human mind is shaped by some outside agency—parents, guardians, State or Church. So in making his decision to shape the destiny of a human mind he was merely substituting himself for some other agency. As a matter of fact, he was actually launching the experiment of allowing a

human mind to shape its own destiny, if you will, for perhaps the first time in history. Sitting in judgment upon the act that had occasioned the flight of a daughter from her father's roof, if the parental objection of the match had been based upon matters of family and race, if Lynnhaven had sprung from an inferior strain, Kilrain would have supported the objection, since he knew that superior humans are no more bred from inferior strains than race horses are bred from jackasses. But Lynnhaven, if anything, was of better strain than the objecting parties. The objection had been based purely upon financial consideration. So Kilrain, from his judgment seat in the North, handed down a verdict that the family had forfeited its right to this infant and that his own right to it should be substituted."

"Well, however he arrived at the conclusion," Harrington said, "I repeat that the outcome of the experiment justified the means. And just how did you know all this?"

"Kilrain had to confide in some one to make sure that his plans would be carried out. I rambled the North alone, and both of us entertained similar ideas in many lines. I was his one friend. He confided in Ruvierre because the priest, then stationed at a post in Alberta, had married Lynne's parents and had a record of it. The mother wrote her own story on the flyleaf and on the margins of the pages of a book that Kilrain had among his

effects when he found her. She signed every page. Then there were her own personal trinkets. These, along with a statement from Kilrain, are all in the hands of Ruvierre—or were, until I took them outside last fall. The expiration date upon that provisional legacy left in trust for Lynne's mother or her heirs comes soon now. Kilrain had told Ruvierre that he would bring Lynne to him last year, but he failed to appear. Books, supplies and so on were brought in annually to Ruvierre when the traders came down-river. In midwinter Kilrain would travel to the Mackenzie to get them. Sometimes, however, he missed a year, traveling to some isolated trading post far across the divide to the Yukon slope. You've heard of the mysterious bearded stranger who drove a team of Mackenzie huskies and outdistanced all pursuers who suspected him of having made a big gold strike in the interior and attempted to follow him. That was the Old Man of the North."

"I had divined the connection," Harrington informed.

"So Ruvierre was not given to worrying if Kilrain missed one winter. But the expiration date was drawing near and the Old One had not been to the Mackenzie in over two years. The priest was headed outside to place the proofs of identity before representatives of Lynne's family. I saved him the trip and took them outside myself when the traders went up-river to Track's End last fall. I did not

know until I returned to Simpson post just before break-up time that you had not returned last year. Upon hearing it, I kept on traveling to learn the cause of the delay; which brings us back to Laverne—or McNair.”

“I know of Laverne,” Harrington said. “On the Yukon side he is reported to make long trips over into this Liard country, but farther to the west and south. What leads you to believe that Laverne, more than any other, would have knowledge of the gold here?”

“Lynnhaven found gold on the creek on which they wintered. It was merely a pocket, rich but of no considerable extent. I worked it out myself many years ago, after the Old Man of the North told me of it. But Lynnhaven believed it to be fabulously rich—a Golconda. Lynne’s mother did not launch one message but scores of them, in any way she could devise. In each one she related the news of the strike and offered to share it with the one who would come to her rescue. Some eight or nine years ago a native of the Mackenzie, one Anatak, found a bottle containing five slabs of birch bark on which there was writing. The white man to whom he showed it proceeded to keep it, evidence that he considered it of probable value to himself. Anatak knew that the drift pile in which he had found the message had been left there by the high water of ten years or so before, so it was very old. When he related the incident to me, I thought it

likely that the message was one of the many launched by Lynne's mother, its possible value resting on the mention of the gold strike. No doubt the man who had stolen it from Anatak believed that the discoverers had perished and that it was open to the one who would locate it. As I had already worked out that pocket of gold years before I knew that the man would have his trouble for nothing, even if he should find the spot, which was unlikely, so thought little of it. For years Laverne has been coming over the divide and prospecting the various tributaries of the Liard. Klatakan told me that Laverne sat for hours studying five little slabs of birch bark. Then it occurred to me that Laverne was the man who had purloined five similar slabs of bark from Anatak eight or nine years before. Also I gathered that the long hunt had become an obsession and had probably affected his mind. Klatakan told him of the Old Man of the North and of the infant girl he had brought to the Iklut camp twenty years back, and that they now lived at the phantom falls. Laverne had had no way of determining on what tributary of the Liard the message had been launched so he had been prospecting in the dark, so to speak. You may judge what effect Klatakan's story would have upon him. He decided that he knew where the gold was at last, but it was not deserted as he had believed, so he planned to get it anyway. He headed back westward across the divide as usual. But that same winter a man came

in from the west by dog team, made a canoe and put off down the Liard after the break-up. I saw him at long range but he didn't answer my hail. Subsequent inquiry proved that he had not been seen passing any Nahanni camp below where this stream empties into the Liard. So I concluded that your McNair was Laverne. In any event, it doesn't matter greatly who he was so long as he failed. If Laverne does not reappear, then we may assume that he was the one. But whoever he was, his purpose was the same."

"And we will never know whether the Old Man of the North passed out from fatigue and exposure on the trail, or whether Laverne bush-whacked him before coming here to finish the job," Harrington said reflectively.

"No. The North seldom gives up her secrets," Villiers agreed.

This new knowledge of Lynne's affairs, linking her with a family and with civilization, caused Harrington's civilized mind to reassert itself once more. A legacy of startling dimensions awaited her, once her identity was established. Again that troublesome voice whispered to him of duty; that it was his duty to insist that she go outside and take possession of what rightfully belonged to her; that he had no right to keep her here so that she would sacrifice it.

“The devil!” he exploded to Villiers. “I’ll never be able to strike off the shackles of standardized civilized thought. Here is enough gold to keep a dozen families in luxury for a lifetime—and their heirs after them. I am a comparatively rich man myself. It is my own wish to live on here with Lynne. It is her wish to live on here with me. In that case, such wealth as we already have will be ten times what we need. What could it possibly benefit either of us, then, to possess still more wealth? Nothing! But I’m too much a product of civilization—too steeped in its standards—to escape the religion of wealth. My reason, inclination, every fiber of my natural being, cries out to stay here and to keep Lynne here with me. Then up crops that damned duty idea again. It insists that I cannot assume the responsibility of allowing Lynne to sacrifice her inheritance. How can you account for a mind like mine? I know how the Old Man of the North would have acted in the face of such a situation as this. He’d have snapped his fingers, followed his inclination, and told the whole wide world to go to hell if it didn’t approve. But I can’t do that. My conscience still reacts to standards that my reasoning intelligence refuses longer to recognize. She has made her decision to remain on here from lack of experience. She must go outside and decide from experience. Otherwise, I would always

reproach myself with having deprived her of much that she might otherwise have enjoyed."

"Yes, you would never know," Villiers agreed. "Also there is one thing, I believe, of which she herself would never be quite sure until it is demonstrated before her own eyes. Yes. By all means, we must take her outside."

CHAPTER XVI

AT FIRST it had been very exciting. There were so many new things to see. Also there were so many new things to learn. Thousands of little details, seemingly trivial, yet apparently very essential. Not so much in matters of apparel. Once she had had lovely things— things that Pan had brought in for her through Ruvierre, the priest. And every night she had discarded her buckskins and dressed in her imported finery for dinner with him, while Tanlika had served them. Pan had insisted upon that. So it had not been difficult to accustom herself to the loose flowing skirts that flapped round her ankles and impeded free movement. The Old Man of the North had trained her to all that. But there were so many other things; for example, about when and where one should or should not sleep. At home, Lynne had never quite acquired full regularity in the custom of dividing her days into the long alternating periods of wakefulness and of slumber into which modern man apportions his time. Instead, she possessed the faculty of sleeping for brief periods whenever and wherever drowsiness assailed her, conditions being propitious, with the conse-

quence that she had cat-napped all over the landscape throughout the twenty-four hours, whenever she wished. Perhaps that tendency had been fostered by the seasonal peculiarities of her northern habitat where the time of day means little, the time of year everything. With the long winters of perpetual twilight and the brief summers when the North seemed bathed in everlasting light, there were but two short periods annually when days and nights recurred with sufficient regularity to render it feasible for one to apportion his time into alternating periods best adopted for activity and for somnolence as accomodated to the swing of the sun.

Rushing eastward across the continent by train, Lynne had gloried in the speed of their progress, was fascinated by the flashing panorama of countryside that unrolled before her eyes. Then, suddenly, she had become very drowsy and so she had curled up in her seat and slept. Others about her also were napping in their seats. Then the trip had been broken by a three-day stop-over in a large mid-western city. And one day, in the luxurious lobby of the best hotel that the place afforded, Lynne had tired of watching the passing throngs and had draped her lovely young self upon a couch and slept. Men had stopped and stared, while women elevated their eyebrows expressively and the clerk, believing her ill, had been on the point of summoning the house physician when Villiers and Harrington

came in. Harrington had waked her gently and explained that one did not sleep in the hotel lobbies.

"And why not?" she had asked.

"Because there are people all about, Lovely," he had explained.

"But there were people all about in the train, and they slept. So did I," she argued. "Where is the difference?"

"No difference, actually," Harrington had confessed. "It is merely custom. The one is sanctioned, the other is not."

Lynne had thought that extremely silly and Harrington could not dispute the basic absurdity of the fact that it was permissible for a woman to sleep at will in the seat of a crowded Pullman, yet she could not stretch out for a comfortable nap in the lobby of a hotel without creating a public scandal.

And also there was the fact that when one retired to one's room in a hotel for the night it was for the purpose of remaining there until a prescribed hour, not too early, the following morning. Whether or not one was sleepy seemed to have no bearing on the matter. It simply was not down in the cards that one might rise and prowl about hotel corridors and the silent dark streets of cities between midnight and dawn without rousing active suspicion.

And so it seemed in all other matters of life. There were a thousand things like that, minor taboos prescribed by the conventions of civilized society. But Lynne did not resent them in the least. There were

certain parallels that she might draw, and her native intelligence worked out each equation, no matter how absurd and inconsistent it might seem at first glance.

Actually, the busy and bustling throngs about her entered into her considerations as little as had the surging pack of huskies that had traveled with her in the North; less, in fact—far less—for she had been careful to win and hold the understanding of her dogs. She had moulded the various animals in her pack largely into one pattern to which they conformed, and she had refrained from violating precedent to an extent that would be beyond their comprehension and so offend their sense of propriety. These scurrying millions of humans about her had been moulded into much the same pattern by society, she sagely decided, so it was best that she subscribe to the little details of conduct which to them seemed indispensable. Therefore, since her perceptions were particularly keen, she endeavored to conform.

And Harrington, who had been filled with apprehension lest the bloom of her charming naturalness should be rubbed off by contact with civilization, to be replaced by artificial mannerisms, now sardonically accused himself of becoming her tutor in artificiality. Still, he recognized the necessity for the observance of certain conventions. Conduct must be more or less standardized even to the lesser details in those parts of the earth where human kind foregathers in teeming millions. Otherwise the

civilized world would become a madhouse of individualism.

All men turned to look at Lynne a second time, covetously, most of them, and all women appraised her from toe to crown, wistfully some of them, others enviously and not a few resentfully. Aside from her breath-taking beauty there was some odd arresting quality about her that commanded attention and inspired in others a vague and envious longing for something that seemed beyond their comprehension.

All this affected Lynne not at all. She was unselfconscious to a high degree. The truth was that Lynne, while no doubt inheriting from a thousand generations the gregarious instincts of the human race, had been reared in such isolation that the instinct had become atrophied in her to a great extent. Lynne, most positively, was not gregarious in the sense of wishing to associate intimately with crowds. Inherited instincts, in all life from plants to man, are plastic, not to be uprooted, but responsive to the process of being molded by environment. By years of association with but two humans, Kilrain and Tanlika, Lynne's inherited instincts of gregariousness had become adapted to limited contact with her kind. That had become a positive and well-developed trait. It was now too late for her to adapt herself to intimate association with many, except by conscious effort to subordinate the dictates of her own nature. Always it would seem

natural to her to associate intimately with but very few individuals and to accord to those few her entire interest. To dissipate that interest among many would constitute a breach of natural inclinations and could be effected only by effort of will. Her present association with Clay and Villiers seemed to her the most natural of all, a subconscious return to the all-satisfying trio of her infancy—Pan, Tanlika and herself. To Harrington she accorded not only the vast love that she had felt for the Old Man of the North but the added intensity of the love of mate for mate. To Villiers she gave that same generous measure of affection that she had once bestowed upon Tanlika. Thus the demands of every avenue of her nature were completely satisfied by these contacts, gloriously so, and the thronging crowds were but a background. She was pleasant to all others whom she met, but her interest in them was destined to be mild. Even in civilized society there are many individuals so constituted—to a lesser degree, of course, and modified by necessary contacts—a harking back, no doubt, to that pre-tribal time when mankind prowled the jungles in family groups. Reflecting thus, Harrington was well content. Also he was glad that her thoughts often reverted to that far northern cabin that stood near the phantom falls; to their dogs, left in the care of a trader near Track's End. Even the excitement of viewing new scenes daily could not drive those things wholly from her thoughts.

"The deer will be coming down from the North now," she said once. And another time, "Queen will be wondering why we do not come to praise her new puppies. They should be two months old by now."

But her mention of things northern became less frequent as the months wore on, and Harrington wondered regretfully if she was becoming entirely weaned away from it all. Lynne, on the other hand, was endeavoring to adapt herself to this new life which she thought Clay wished to live. But after four months, during which they had traveled extensively and tasted to the full the delights of civilization, home was calling her, and she mentioned the North less frequently for the reason that mention of it occasioned a wave of homesickness. She wanted her dogs, felt the urge to run with them across the open plains and through the forests—to be gone from this clang and clatter of train and traffic and the press of swarming humanity. But she said nothing of all this to Harrington. This was his life and she must learn to live it. And Harrington, himself longing for the vast peace and quiet of that far northern cabin and for the wilderness where a man might know himself intimately, felt that to deprive Lynne of all this which she was now experiencing for the first time and to take her back to a life of isolation would be an act of base selfishness.

Lynne observed the scurrying multitudes with considerable interest.

"Their faces are so different—no two the same,

yet there is something of the same quality in every face," she remarked to Villiers and Harrington. "They want something—every one of them. What is it that they want, Clay?"

"Happiness," Harrington said. "They are seeking it without knowing what they seek. They set some goal and strain toward it, only to find when they have attained it that it was not what they sought. That's the composite face of civilization, Lovely, that you're seeing behind the mask of each individual face."

"Will they ever find it, what they're looking for?"

"No," said Harrington. "It is doubtful. A very few of them perhaps."

"It is tragic, some way," she said reflectively. "Pan didn't have that look, nor Tanlika. You had it when you first came into my country. That was the first time I had seen it. It puzzled me." She regarded him closely. "You haven't that look about you now."

"No," he said. "I have found what I wanted—you."

Her expressive gray eyes said things to him that caused a stranger, who had looked into them in passing, to blunder against three successive pedestrians while he gazed over his shoulder at her retreating back.

And as her eyes peered behind the surface expression of the faces about her and detected the strained spirits underneath, so her ears caught the

hidden inflections and undercurrents in the voices that were modulated for concealment.

"They say what they do not mean," she announced. "And they laugh when they are neither happy nor amused. It is only a gesture."

She realized now the immensity of the world of men and the relatively small likelihood that Clay would meet that other woman, the thought of whom had occasioned her such mental travail. Still, the thought of it persisted in the background of her mind. That was the eternal feminine in her. Always there would be that feeling that the next woman encountered might prove to be the one to whom Clay's allegiance had once been given. Would he give it to her still if they should chance to meet? How could she be quite sure? That was the one little apprehension that seemed destined to persist, a grain of sand on the mental eyeball of her happiness.

Of the delights of civilization, in the main, she had seen quite enough for the present. It did not bore her exactly, but there was a certain amount of sameness, of repetition to it all after the novelty had worn off. And that composite face of civilization peering from behind each individual mask, that want of something, depressed her. But there was one thing with which she was never satiated—music. It spoke to her, telling her things that it did not seem to convey to others. She would linger to listen even to the blare of a mechanical piano

in a penny arcade or to the drums and cymbals of religious enthusiasts on street corners in preference to visiting some famous edifice that stood as a monument to man's constructive ingenuity. The very thing that she adored above all other delights of civilization was, strangely enough, the very thing that occasioned the sharpest pangs of homesickness. Music, of whatever variety, while intoxicating her, tugged her heartstrings and led her spirit back to her northland home.

They were dressing for the theater—the last time incidentally, that Harrington would take her to the theater for many a moon, though he did not know it then—when a band of sorts paraded through the streets below and the strains of a march rose to their windows. She came to him swiftly, all pink-and-white loveliness, and twined her arms round his neck.

“I wish I could express it, Clay dear, what it does to me,” she said. “It seems as if it were trying to recall things to my mind that have been forgotten—strange things that I should remember but cannot. I can't quite get it.”

“Music affects you in the same way that you affect me,” he said. “And that's as near as I can define it myself.”

At the theater she gave herself up unreservedly, voluptuously, to the strains that swept from wild physical barbaric rhythm to heights of pure intellectual delight. At one period, during a heavy

throbbing reiteration that was almost monotony, yet draggingly compelling, she clutched Harrington's arm and whispered, "The falls! The falls! Don't you hear them?" And again, "Listen, the huskies are beginning to howl. Don't you hear their voices lifting above the boom of the falls? It all blends in."

Throughout she commented in whispers as to what it told her. She heard the sustained screeching voice of the storm king riding an Arctic blizzard, suddenly subdued to the hiss of wings as millions of migrants returned to greet the loving spring, with here and there the silvery fluting notes of a returning plover sprinkled in; and through, above and below it all, the booming rhythmic throb of the falls. The music dripped to a close. The lights came on.

Lynne turned suddenly to Harrington and rested both hands on his arm. "I have it now!" She was utterly unconscious of the closepacked hundreds seated round them. "Music carries you back. This takes me back until I hear every note in the North—the wind in the trees, the rapids, the birds and insects—everything. When I go back there the music of the falls and the screech of the storms will bring me back to this. Don't you see?"

Villiers was leaning towards Harrington and a trifle forward to catch her low-voiced, hurried flow of words. A hundred pairs of eyes were riveted on this oddly assorted but arresting trio. She was so

obviously unconscious of any but the three of them that no observer could even suspect her sudden side-wise pose to be a play to the gallery, a bid for attention. For it was also obvious that the whole wide world would always accord her notice without any effort on her part. And many ears were strained, with little success, to catch the substance of her low-pitched words.

"It carries every individual back consciously for as far as his recollection goes," she said. "But so much farther than that. Unconsciously, he is carried back to the beginning of the race. It is the rhythm of all Nature that has throbbed in every cell since the beginning. The swing of the planets, the roar of storm and cataracts, the howling of wolves and huskies and the mating songs of birds—they're all part of the same. There must be rhythm and harmony through it all, otherwise the universe would disintegrate. This sort of music is the rhythm of all Nature beautifully expressed. Men who compose it must necessarily do it by feeling it; they couldn't possibly think it out. Conscious recollection doesn't reach back that far. That's why it is difficult to define music intelligently. You feel it but cannot express it adequately in words."

Villiers and Harrington nodded smiling agreement and understanding. She sat back, delighted at having been able to grasp a partial definition of the thing toward which her mind had been groping. She laughed contentedly, and in that laugh were

all of the beautiful things that she had just endeavored to express in words. Those who were sufficiently near to hear it felt some way that the world was a far better place in which to live than they had previously suspected.

"If we could only take that back home with us—music," she said dreamily, after a space. "All the rest of it doesn't matter. Still, I can always hear it in the falls after this."

Then, after another interval of silence, just as the lights were dimmed, "That's the larger, the universal aspect of music, that carries all life, unconsciously, back to the beginning. Consciously it carries each individual back somewhere along the line within the scope of his recollection. With me, all music will always recall that day when you came paddling up the river, singing. Do you remember, Clay?"

CHAPTER XVII

THE final matters of Lynne's inheritance seemed in a fair way to be settled before noon. On several occasions she had gone with Villiers to confer with Allison, a representative of her mother's family who had assured them that there would be no difficulty. Long since, her cousin, daughter of her mother's sister and chief beneficiary of her grandfather's vast estate, had been summoned from a far part of the world. But Alice Chatham Vane had seen no reason why she should discommode herself by leaving and hurrying home before the season ended. After all, the claimant was the one who would benefit, not herself, so if there were to be inconvenience on either side, surely it should be borne by this long-lost relative. So she had tarried but at last she had returned, and they were to meet in Allison's presence at ten o'clock.

Harrington had attained none of the few previous meetings nor did he know the bare names of any of the principals save Lynne's. Villiers, for reasons of his own, had requested that he should be allowed to carry on negotiations alone. And Harrington, with more confidence in the judgment of this man

than in that of any other of his acquaintance, had acceded to the request without a question.

As Lynne and Villiers were about to enter the cab that waited to convey them to the conference, Villiers handed the girl into the conveyance and returned briefly to Harrington.

"Join us at eleven," he instructed, telling him the appointed place. "Your presence may be necessary."

Then he was gone.

Those who conversed in Allison's office constituted an oddly assorted group. There was Allison himself, a man of vast affairs. There was Ruvierre, the bearded priest of the North, his voluminous brown and white beard almost concealing the front of his flowing black cassock. There was Villiers, the product of mixed races. Lynne's loveliness shed a radiance over this motley gathering upon which presently Alice Chatham Vane, one of the half-dozen wealthiest women in the world, entered composedly.

Lynne, at the moment, was gazing absorbedly at a picture of her mother, whom she had never seen to remember. Lynne had evinced little interest in this meeting with her cousin. And Alice Vane had anticipated little but boredom while hastening through the necessary details of the transaction. But at first glimpse each cousin knew a swift hot pride that the other was of her own blood. Each recognized in the other the stamp of the world's royalty. The one, schooled to conceal emotion to the point where casual-

ness was almost a religion, greeted her long-lost relative composedly. But Lynne, child of natural expression, gazed with manifest delight upon the glorious creature that was Alice Vane.

"I didn't know you would be like this," she said.

"You approve of me then?" Alice Vane inquired, smiling upon her."

"Oh! Yes!" Lynne murmured, appraising her frankly.

"You must come to me at once, my dear, as soon as we conclude the few necessary details here," said Alice Vane. "It should not take long. Mr. Allison tells me that everything is quite in order and that there can be no doubt of your identity. If there were any doubt, it would have been dispelled in my mind immediately after one glance at you. You come of Chatham stock, unquestionably."

With characteristic abruptness, Lynne turned to Allison.

"Will it inconvenience her in the least if I should take this—this bequest?" she demanded.

"Not in the very least," Alice Vane answered for him. "It has been waiting for you, untouched, and it is really very little, in comparison."

It was very little, perhaps, as compared to Alice Vane's holdings, yet Villiers had told her that it constituted a really tremendous fortune. Alice Vane, of course, was one of the very few of the world's favorites. She had everything that any human might desire, Lynne reflected. But did she? Be-

neath her cousin's exterior air of happiness and vast self-possession, Lynne detected that same specter that she had sensed lurking behind all faces in this world of civilization—that ceaseless want of something that seemed always unfulfilled. What more could Alice Vane require to make her life complete? Yet she wanted something desperately. The signs were there for Lynne to read, however effectually they might be concealed from others. But it was certain that she did not want Lynne's legacy. That would mean nothing to her. It was something that wealth could not purchase. That much was certain, else Alice Vane would have acquired it long since. No. It was something else.

An attorney whom Allison had called in cleared his throat and read sonorously from a lengthy document. Lynne was not much interested in it. Her mind was probing for the secret of that shade of sadness, that desperate want of something that rested just beneath the charming external serenity of her cousin's face. Alice Vane smiled at her. But the eyes did not smile. Just then the door opened and Harrington stepped in.

Lynne had not expected him and her eyes widened with swift pleasure. Looking into them, Harrington felt himself drawn to her as if she had opened her arms to him. Then, his eyes straying from one to another of the group, his startled glance focussed upon Alice Vane. Lynne, following the direction of his gaze, saw the veiled light come to the eyes of her

cousin at the sight of his towering form. Instantly, unerringly, Lynne knew what it was that Alice Vane wanted—the one thing further that she asked of life. This, then—this glorious cousin of hers—was the girl of the story.

Alice Vane rose easily and advanced to Harrington.

“Why, Clay! Clay Harrington. This is almost like seeing the ghost of a dear departed one after a lapse of years. Your friends had just about given you up as lost,” she said. “I’m so glad to see you again, Clay. Where in the world have you been hiding all these years?”

Beneath the casual manner of address, Lynne detected the hidden vibrations of an interest that was anything but casual; intense, rather—almost breathless. Of all the others present, none save Villiers read into that meeting anything save a cordial greeting between two old friends. Villiers had deliberately arranged this meeting. In all of her life Lynne had known but one great apprehension. Always some vestige of it would linger with her unless the very root of the thought that occasioned it should be eliminated. She must prove the groundlessness of her apprehension to herself. So Villiers sat imperturbably and waited while Harrington and Alice Vane exchanged the customary casual greetings between two valued friends who have not met for long. Alice Vane rested her hand in friendly fashion on Harrington’s arm.

Then Lynne rose and crossed to them, moving with that wild free grace of hers. She lifted the hand from Clay's arm and placed her own there in its stead. Alice Vane, looking into the gray eyes of her new-found cousin saw a hint of sorrow there, and deep beneath it an odd flare, as if greenish lightning, held in leash, lurked there ready to leap forth. From some dim inner recess of her being the thought sprang to her consciousness that for a fraction of a second death had stared her grimly in the face. But her reasoning intelligence discarded the thought as instantly, for Lynne had turned her eyes to Harrington.

"Clay, this matter will all be settled within an hour. I'm tired of all this and want to go home. Will you take me home, Clay, at once?"

A glad light leaped into Harrington's eyes, as swift pictures of that far northern cabin, of a girl running at the head of a swarm of wolfish dogs, of tens of thousands of caribou migrating across the tundra, of many allied scenes, flitted kaleidoscopically across the negative of his mind.

"Any minute, Lovely, that you say the word," he responded instantly.

"Could you make the arrangements to start to-day?" she asked.

"This very day," he assured her.

Alice Vane, who had dominated every situation in which she had figured even slightly since her infancy,

divined that she was now a mere helpless spectator, forgotten by these two.

"Then would you mind going now to make the arrangements while I conclude this matter alone?" Lynne asked. "Then I will join you and we will start at once."

Harrington lifted his eyes to Villiers, who had told him that his presence here might be necessary. Villiers nodded slightly. Harrington had already accomplished all that Villiers had desired of him, though he did not know it.

"It might be well," Villiers acquiesced softly.

"All right, Lynne, I'm on my way," Harrington announced. He indulged in the formula of a brief cordial leave-taking to Alice Vane, some pleasant meaningless phrases to the effect that it was devastating to have met only to part again so swiftly. He voiced a polite hope that they would meet again soon, though both of them knew that they would never meet again—the polite inanities without which life would be hideous in the crowded centers of civilization. Then the door closed behind him.

Lynne turned slowly back and resumed her seat.

The attorney cleared his throat again, preparatory to resuming his reading of the lengthy document. Then Lynne spoke.

"I should like this—this bequest to go to her, to my cousin," she announced. "Will you take it—from me?" she urged of Alice Vane.

Her cousin smiled at the entreaty, the hint of tragedy, in Lynne's expressive eyes.

"Sporting of you, my dear," she said, divining the source of this generous impulse. "But I have so much as it is. I'd far rather you should have it."

"But I can't take it," Lynne declared, rising. "Some way I just cannot."

"If I might suggest," Allison intervened. "It is probably lack of experience as to what wealth can do for you—or an impulsive piece of altruism—" Then as Lynne shook her head decisively and announced, "I'll not take it," he turned to Villiers for support. This careless disregard of so large an amount seemed to his financial mind to border on the irreligious. At least, it was evidence of immature judgment. He recalled the weeks of careful investigation to make sure that this claimant was not an impostor. This sudden turn in events was something quite outside the bounds of his previous experience. It upset all his ideas of balance.

"But since it was left to you—" he began.

"Since it was," Lynne interrupted. "I should be entitled to do with it as I please. There are reasons why I cannot take it."

Again Allison turned to Villiers for support.

"Why not?" Villiers murmured. "Why not—if she doesn't wish it? I would suggest that she be permitted to do as she thinks best." He smiled and asserted, "I can assure you that she will do as she chooses in any event."

"I leave the disposition of it to you," Lynne said to Villiers. "So long as none of it comes to me. I am going now." She crossed to her cousin and extended both hands. "I'm sorry," she said in a low voice, her words inaudible to the others. "I would share anything with you—give you anything I could—but that."

"Yes, my dear," said Alice Vane. "I quite understand."

Then Lynne was gone. Straight as a homing bird she was going to the man that she would never lose. She knew that now.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE gold camps of Alaska and the Yukon ran their course, as all gold camps do. The population departed from many a once-thriving town, leaving behind only the deserted buildings echoing with the hollow futility of dead ambitions. Many gold seekers linger on. It is still predicted among the prospecting fraternity that the greatest strike in all history will be made one day in the unknown regions to the east of the divide that separates the Yukon and Mackenzie watersheds. But the interior still guards its secrets, and that one little group of intrepid souls who once sought to unravel its mysteries is gone. There was Culver—but of course the manner of his passing is known. He died on the Porcupine, raving of a strike rich beyond the dreams of avarice, somewhere on the Mackenzie slope of the divide. There was the bearded stranger who once came from the unknown regions to the east to purchase supplies at the Yukon posts; there was Laverne and Old Van Dorn; the fabled Old Man of the North; and there was Clay Harrington. They are all gone and no man knows how they passed. One and all, they headed into the unknown regions to the

eastward, and the North that they knew and loved claimed them in the end. It is always so. Perhaps Harrington's name lingered longer than the others in the annals of the mining camps, for in his detached and careless way he had grubstaked many a prospector. Some of them struck it rich and waited for Harrington to return and claim his share of the golden flood. But he never did. One particularly, Al Reese, grubstaked with Harrington's winnings in a poker game, so it was said, made a big strike in the very spring after Harrington had disappeared. He named the creek after his benefactor. The diggings on Harrington Creek are deserted now. Only the scars remain as evidence of the swarming activity of days gone by. But many a million in yellow metal was harvested from the placer workings of that stream before the gold played out.

Occasionally, in one part of the world or another, at some resort or on board a ship, a tall man and a lovely woman, accompanied by a swarm of lovable youngsters, make their appearance. There is about them an air of consequence—not arrogance, but rather a suggestion that they own the world and know it. Usually a very swarthy individual accompanies them; an Oriental prince perhaps. An arresting group. Observers know instantly that these people are somehow different. They seem possessed of some quality, baffling analysis, but which rouses a wistful envy in the breasts of all who see them. One feels vaguely that they have attained to some definite

goal toward which all others are vainly striving but which seems ever to recede. No one can give it a name. Possibly it is a state of absolute serenity, the tranquillity of spirit that comes only to those who have found what they want on earth, who have nothing more to ask of life and know it. None know whence they come or to where they journey when once again they disappear.

After the lapse of a quarter of a century the Moccasin Telegraph is clicking again about the country of the big falls that no man has seen. Isolated tribes throughout almost a million square miles of wilderness have strange tales to tell. Versions vary greatly but there is a germ of the same idea in each. It is said that back in there where the ground burns near the phantom falls there exists a race of tall fair people of great strength and much magic. All agree that this race rules the wild things. It is related that great wolves herd bands of caribou for them on the tundra and that wild ducks, geese and ptarmigans lay fresh eggs in their dooryard.

Now the North is a land of odd rumors, any of which may prove to be true, for there are vast areas that have never known the tread of a white man and it is from these unknown regions that most of the strange tales emanate. It may be that these things are true. In any event, those who have lived long in the North do not turn a deaf ear when the Moccasin Telegraph is rumbling.

THE END







